QANTAS SOCCEROOS v THAILAND FRIDAY 2 SEPTEMBER 2011 SUNCORP STADIUM

THE SOCCEROO

AUSTRALIA

ISSUE: 21 $10.00

THE ROAD TO RIO

Qantas Socceroos captain Lucas Neill speaks about the journey ahead for Australia

SEASON 7 AT THE DOUBLE

Qantas Socceroos superstars Kewell and Emerton headline new Hyundai A-League

THAILAND PROFILE

Thailand's high-energy, skillful brand of football will be a stern test for the Qantas Socceroos

LEGENDS: JOHN KOSMINA

We pay tribute to the legendary former Qantas Socceroos striker known by all simply as "Kossie"

Competition ends 31/08/11. To find out more about voting and the detailed terms and conditions go to optus.com.au/football

AUSTRALIA

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FRANK LOWY

FFA Chairman extends a warm welcome to our friends from Thailand

Welcome to the start of a journey that I hope will bring great success for the Qantas Socceroos and a lot of joy to Australia's football community.

Tonight, in our first match on the road towards the 2014 FIFA World Cup, we face Thailand here at Suncorp Stadium. The last time our two nations met was at the AFC Asian Cup 2007 in Bangkok, and on that evening we were fortunate enough to win 4-0.

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to our friends from Thailand, who are making their first visit to Australia for a competitive match. I hope you enjoy your stay while you are here in our country.

Like us, the Thais will be dreaming of the coveted prize of a place among 32 nations in Brazil. The competition will be tough in every qualification match and I'm sure the Qantas Socceroos, under the guidance of coach Holger Osieck, are well prepared for the task.

I would like to thank all our partners for their ongoing support and especially to the Queensland Premier Anna Bligh and her Government for their contribution to hosting tonight's match.

My best wishes to both teams for what I am sure will be a competitive and enjoyable match, and also the best of luck to both countries as they embark on their respective campaigns to qualify for the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil.

Frank Lowy AC
CHAIRMAN
FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

My best wishes to both teams for what I'm sure will be a competitive match

FOOTBALL FEDERATION AUSTRALIA

ANNA BLIGH

The Premier welcomes the teams for tonight's clash in Brisbane

Welcome to the opening match of the third round of 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers with the Qantas Socceroos taking on Thailand in Brisbane on the road to compete in the Brazil 2014 FIFA World Cup.

It's a coup for Queensland to have the opportunity to host a game where local and visiting fans alike will pack Suncorp stadium in a show of support for the Qantas Socceroos as they seek to qualify for a third consecutive FIFA World Cup Finals.

Brisbane has proven itself as a hot spot for football with locals still basking in the afterglow of the Roar's Hyundai A-League Grand Final triumph in March.

And Queenslanders are showing a special interest in the match as we proudly follow local Brisbane boy Matt McKay's growing stature with the national team as he plays for Australia.

Major events like a FIFA World Cup qualifier enhance Queensland's reputation as the sporting events state, attract visitors from interstate and overseas and play a vital role in supporting the Queensland tourism industry.

It's shaping up to be a Super September weekend and I encourage visitors to stay on after the game to enjoy the Brisbane Festival.

The festival runs from September 3-24 and will see the city buzzing with a festival atmosphere, music stages, performances and art installations, including a new laser light show - the first of its kind in Australia - lighting up the skyline as part of the Santos City of Lights spectacular.

Brisbane will also host the NRL's round 26 clash when the Broncos take on the Manly Sea Eagles on September 4 - set to be a great game as Queenslanders farewell Darren Lockyer in his last fixture game. Enjoy tonight's match!

Local and visiting fans alike will pack Suncorp stadium in a show of support for the Qantas Socceroos

Anna Bligh
QUEENSLAND PREMIER

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HOLGER OSIECK

The Qantas Socceroos head coach asks for your support

Dear supporters of the Qantas Socceroos, we are at the beginning of a new World Cup campaign.

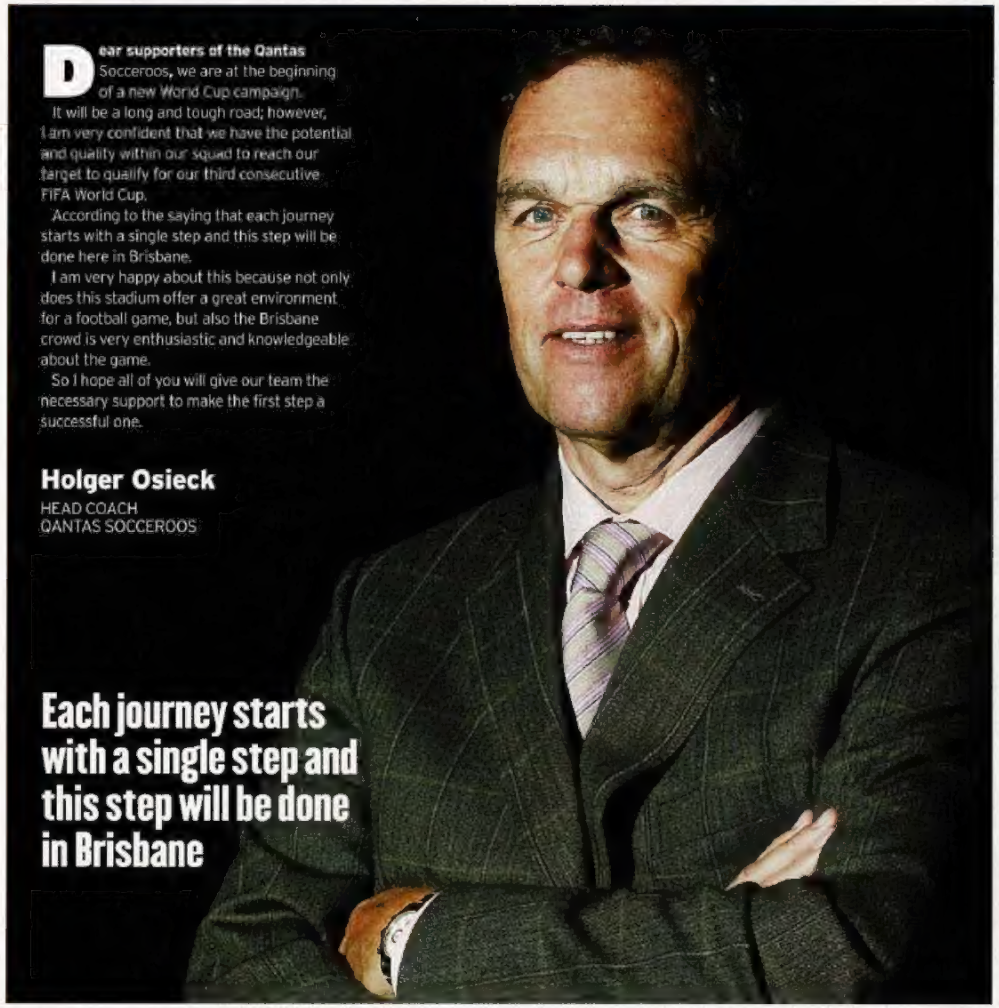
It will be a long and tough road; however, I am very confident that we have the potential and quality within our squad to reach our target to qualify for our third consecutive FIFA World Cup.

According to the saying that each journey starts with a single step and this step will be done here in Brisbane.

I am very happy about this because not only does this stadium offer a great environment for a football game, but also the Brisbane crowd is very enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the game.

So I hope all of you will give our team the necessary support to make the first step a successful one.

Holger Osieck
HEAD COACH
QANTAS SOCCEROOS



Qualification ... all you need to know

A total of 4.5 spots are made available for the AFC. Qualification began with the lowest-ranked teams playing two preliminary rounds in June and July 2011.

The winners of these preliminary rounds qualified into the third round together with seeded nations such as Australia joining qualification for the first time.

In this third round qualification, five groups of four teams play, with the top two in each advancing to the fourth round qualifiers.

In the fourth round...

Ten nations remain split into two groups of five each. This is where automatic qualification spots for 2014 FIFA World Cup are up for grabs – which means the two countries that top Groups A and B qualify automatically for Brazil 2014.

At this point, as per the 4.5 spots rule, the two nations that finish third in these two groups face each other in a two-legged play-off. For instance, in 2010 FIFA World Cup qualification Bahrain and Saudi Arabia played each other after ending third in their respective groups, with Bahrain emerging as victors.

Whoever wins then faces an intercontinental play-off. In 2010 qualifying Bahrain were pitted against the OFC champion.

However, this time the winner will play over two legs against an as yet to be decided fifth-placed opponent from the CONMEBOL 2014 FIFA World Cup qualification.

AUSTRALIA'S GROUP OPPONENTS

In Group D, the Qantas Socceroos are joined by Saudi Arabia, Oman and Thailand. This group will be played over the next six months with the last matches on February 29, 2012. See facing page for more on Australia's opponents.

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Feb 29, 2012	**Australia** v Saudi Arabia
Feb 29, 2012	Oman v Thailand

OTHER GROUPS IN 2014 FIFA WORLD CUP ASIAN QUALIFIERS

GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C	GROUP D	GROUP E
China PR	Korea Republic	Japan	Australia	IR Iran
Jordan	Kuwait	Uzbekistan	Thailand	Qatar
Iraq	UAE	Syria	Saudi Arabia	Bahrain
Singapore	Lebanon	DPR Korea	Oman	Indonesia

Oman

Like Australia, the Omanis have a top-class English Premier League goalkeeper – Wigan Athletic shot-stopper Ali Al Habsi.

And like Thailand, Oman played the Qantas Socceroos at the AFC Asian Cup 2007. The Omanis almost won, too, holding out until virtually the last minute before Tim Cahill did what he does best to help rescue a point in a 1-1 draw.

Back then, they were coached by Argentine Gabriel Calderon, but now it's Paul Le Guen (right). The Frenchman is a former Ligue 1 winner with Lyon (taking them to three straight titles), though his subsequent spells at PSG and Glasgow Rangers were less successful. At the 2010 FIFA World Cup he was in charge of Cameroon, who ended bottom of their group. He'll have plenty to prove with his latest appointment.

Current world ranking:
107 (as of July 2011)
Main man: Ali Al Habsi

Thailand

The Thais are now under a new manager after Bryan Robson left the post recently. The new man on the hot seat is Winfried Schafer (above).

The German has a winning mentality and the silverware to show it with an African Cup of Nations his biggest triumph.

The former German Bundesliga player has got plenty of raw talent to work with as the Thais look to make an impression on this group despite their under-dog tag.

Thailand are known for their technical players, with playmaker Datsakorn Thonglao, attacking full-back Suree Sukha and striker Teerasil Dangda three to watch out for.

And talented former Melbourne Victory defender Surat Sukha is set to return to Australia just months after leaving the Hyundai A-League club.

Current world ranking:
119 (as of July 2011)
Main man: Teerasil Dangda

Saudi Arabia

Dutch great and former Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard recently took over as coach and the Saudis will hope he can help them rediscover their former glory.

In short it's been a disappointing few years for a nation that had been a regular qualifier for FIFA World Cups over recent decades. Nowhere was that disappointment more apparent than in their 2010 FIFA World Cup Asian qualification path.

The Saudis topped their third round group alongside the Uzbeks, but could only finish third in fourth round qualifiers.

This meant a two-legged play-off with rivals Bahrain. After an encouraging 0-0 draw away in Manama, the Saudis conceded two goals at home at the King Fahd Stadium in dramatic fashion.

One goal was conceded in the third minute of time added-on. The late goal proved a fatal blow as the Saudis exited on the away-goals rule following the heart-breaking 2-2 draw.

However with Yasser Al Qahtani, the Saudi Arabia captain and talisman up-front, leading the charge and the respected Rijkaard at the helm, surely there are better days in store?

Current world ranking:
92 (as of July 2011)
Main man: Yasser Al Qahtani ▸

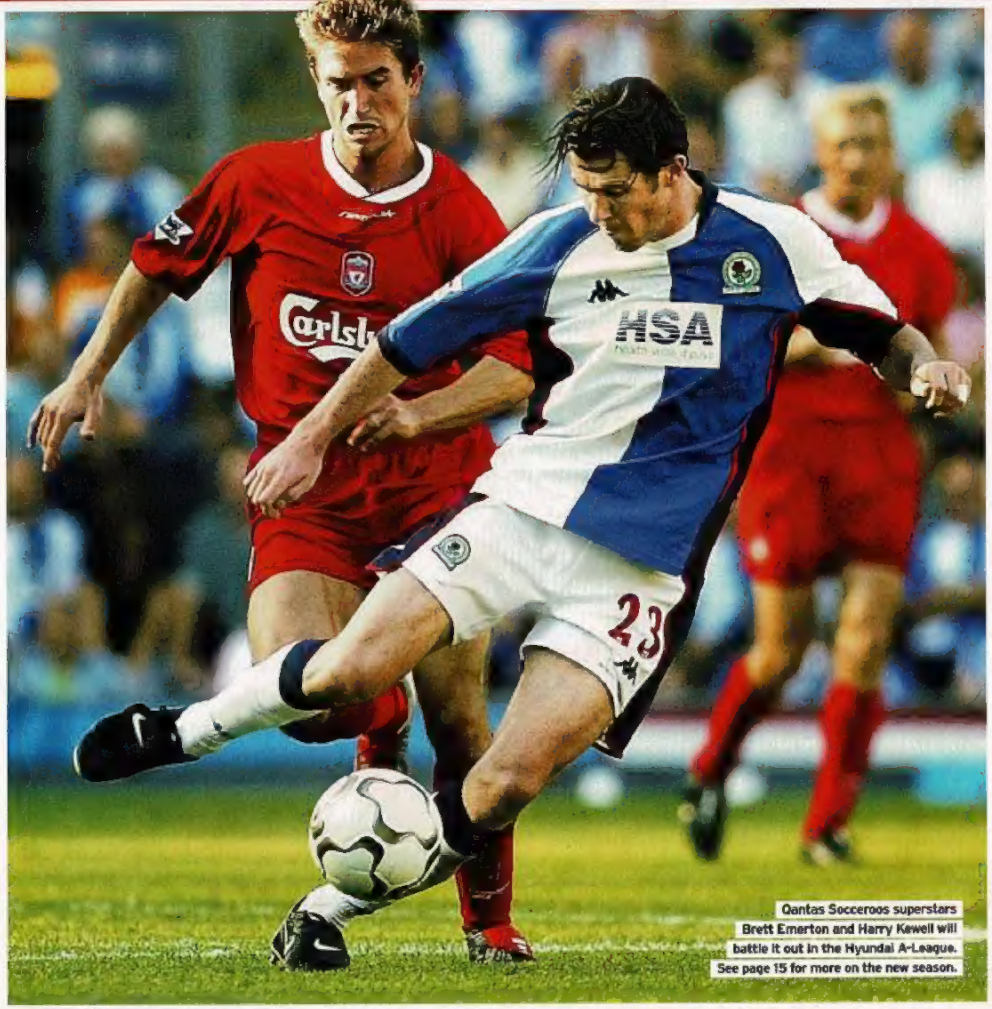
OARSOME STRIKE

QANTAS YOUNG SOCCEROO TOMMY OAR'S CRACKER IN COLOMBIA

In Australia's opening group fixture of the FIFA U-20 World Cup Columbia 2011 in Manizales, the talented young striker came to the Qantas Young Socceroos' rescue with a stunning late strike against Ecuador. After the talented Ecuadorians took an early lead through Juan Govea the Aussies battled back and with just a minute left of normal time, the former Hyundai A-League star's curling left-foot screamer from 30 metres out secured coach Jan Versleijen's team a precious point.

ROUND-UP

A round-up of the latest happenings in Aussie football



Qantas Socceroos superstars Brett Emerton and Harry Kewell will battle it out in the Hyundai A-League. See page 15 for more on the new season.

Elise Kellond-Knight in action for the Westfield Matildas at the 2011 FIFA Women's World Cup.

Road to London opens up

As the Qantas Socceroos begin their 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers, the Westfield Matildas have already kicked off their 2012 London Olympic Games qualifiers in China.

Yesterday, the Aussie girls took on the talented DPR Korea in their opening match at the Jinan Olympic Sports Centre.

It was the first of a gruelling six-team, 11-day round-robin tournament with the top two teams progressing to the 2012 London Olympic Games.

Westfield Matildas' head coach Tom Sermanni announced a 20-player squad (right) with experienced pair Sarah Walsh and Thea Slatyer returning to the fold.

Both have battled back from injuries that kept them out of the FIFA 2011 Women's World Cup in Germany. Aivi Luik also returned after narrowly missing out on a spot on the plane to Germany, coming in for injured Brisbane Roar teammate Lauren Colthorpe.

"We have a large and talented squad and when you can only select 20 players for an 11-day, five-match tournament, you need to be very balanced in the selection process," said Sermanni.

"The flexibility of the playing group given the number of games we have to play over a very short period is key. Both Thea and Walshy bring special qualities to the squad and now they are fully fit will give us the added bonus through their extensive experience and knowledge of playing big matches in Asia."

The Westfield Matildas have also broken into the top 10 of the FIFA Women's world rankings, following their strong showing at the FIFA Women's World Cup.

Jumping two places from equal 11th (with Italy) to 9th, Australia have reached their highest-ever world ranking in football and capped off an exciting 14 months which included a quarter-final appearance in consecutive World Cups and winning the 2010 AFC Women's Asian Cup.

On the individual side, Westfield Matilda Caitlin Foord was awarded the Best Young Player at the 2011 FIFA Women's World Cup. ▸

Brisbane's star Westfield Matilda Tameka Butt.

Westfield Matildas squad

Name	Caps	Club
Teigen Allen	9	Sydney FC
Laura Alleway	4	Roar
Melissa Barbieri	80	Victory
Tameka Butt	23	Roar
Kim Carroll	44	Roar
Lisa De Vanna	71	Roar/ majicJack
Caitlin Foord	5	Sydney FC
Heather Garriock	125	Sydney FC/ LdB Malmo
Elise Kellond-Knight	25	Roar
Samantha Kerr	18	Perth Glory
Aivi Luik	12	Roar
Collette McCallum	68	Perth Glory
Clare Polkinghorne	49	Roar
Sally Shipard	57	Canberra Utd
Kyah Simon	29	Sydney FC
Thea Slatyer	46	Sydney FC
Servet Uzunlar	26	Sydney FC
Emily van Egmond	8	Canberra Utd
Sarah Walsh	62	Sydney FC
Lydia Williams	26	Canberra Utd

Adelaide host Qantas Australian U-23s

Football Federation Australia (FFA), the South Australian Government and Football Federation South Australia (FFSA) have announced the Qantas Australian U-23s will play their first 2012 London Olympic Games Asian qualifier against the United Arab Emirates at Hindmarsh Stadium in Adelaide on Wednesday, September 21.

Adelaide-born Qantas Australian U-23s head coach Aurelio Vidmar was looking forward to getting his team's campaign off to a good start on home soil.

"The results of our home matches will have a large bearing on whether we qualify for the 2012 London Olympic Games, so it is extremely important for us to get a positive start in our first match," said Vidmar.

"Personally, I have plenty of great memories here at Hindmarsh Stadium, so it is a great advantage for us to play in Adelaide."

The Qantas Australian U-23s are drawn in Group B, with Iraq, Uzbekistan, and the UAE, for the third round of the Asian qualifiers for the London 2012 Olympic Games men's football tournament.

Asia are allotted 3.5 slots, with the winner of each group from the third round will automatically progress to next year's Olympic Games.

The three second-placed teams will clash in a play-off from 25 to 29 March, 2012, and the winner of this group will then meet the representatives of Africa for the final berth.

Coach Aurelio Vidmar is happy to be home.

Qantas Joeys back in action at AFC U-16 tournament

The Qantas Joeys will play in the AFC U-16 Championships qualifiers beginning later this month. The competition is held every two years and acts as a qualifying tournament for the FIFA U-17 World Cup.

In Australia's group are Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Myanmar and Guam. The Qantas Joeys begin their campaign on September 12 against the Thais.

They then face Myanmar at Bangkok's Rajamangala Stadium on September 14, quickly followed by a meeting with Hong Kong three days later at the same venue.

The Qantas Joeys then face Guam on September 19 and round out their group against Indonesia on the 22nd.

The top four sides in the Asian championship will advance to the next FIFA U-17 World Cup.

The Qantas Joeys will be looking to build on a solid performance at this year's FIFA U-17 World Cup in Mexico, where they progressed to the Round of 16.

Brisbane Roar face Central Coast in the Hyundai A-League Grand Final rematch on October 8.

Hyundai A-League kick-off

Anticipation ahead of the new Hyundai A-League season is at fever pitch after it was announced that Qantas Socceroos superstars Harry Kewell and Brett Emerton had signed deals to play in the competition starting next month.

Emerton, who will play for Sydney FC, comes to the Hyundai A-League direct from the English Premier League where he has been a star at Blackburn Rovers for many years.

The midfielder's athleticism and exciting style will be a major boost for the Sky Blues.

And Kewell, the former Leeds United, Liverpool and Galatasaray star, has linked with Melbourne Victory in another huge addition to the Hyundai A-League.

The signings have been hailed by fans and media alike and the Qantas Socceroo pair join the Hyundai A-League on a real high following last March's extraordinary Grand Final won by Brisbane Roar over Central Coast.

It reflected a campaign that was widely regarded as the best yet. And now, the roller coaster of emotions cranks up again with Queensland hosting two of the opening round fixtures of the new season.

Reigning champions Brisbane Roar will host Central Coast Mariners (Sat Oct 8, 7.45pm, Suncorp Stadium) in a re-match of the heart-stopping "Orange Sunday" some seven months ago at Suncorp.

The following day, Gold Coast United take on Wellington Phoenix (Sun Oct 9, 4pm, Skilled Park, Gold Coast) in another eye-catching clash.

The rest of the first round sees Newcastle host Melbourne Heart (Sat Oct 8, 4.30pm, Ausgrid Stadium), Melbourne Victory at home to Sydney FC (Sat Oct 8, 6.30pm, Etihad Stadium) and Perth Glory vs Adelaide Utd (Sun Oct 9, 4.30pm, nib Stadium).

What a time to become a member of your local Hyundai A-League club.

Brisbane Roar fans call their Membership Hotline on 1300 100 326, while Gold Coast United supporters call their Membership Hotline on 1300 88 36 88. ▸

Star signings hailed by FFA

Football Federation Australia (FFA) have hailed the double signings of Qantas Socceroo superstars Harry Kewell and Brett Emerton to play in the Hyundai A-League.

"The signings tells the story of ambition, credibility and growth for the game in Australia," said FFA CEO Ben Buckley.

In two of the biggest announcements in the history of the game, Kewell inked a deal with Melbourne Victory last month.

And just days later it was announced that his Qantas Socceroo team-mate Emerton has put pen to paper with Sydney FC.

What's more, pair look set to square off in a round one Hyundai A-League blockbuster when Melbourne Victory host Sydney FC on Saturday, October 8.

Gold Coast United sign new shirt sponsor

GOLD Coast United have a new-look playing strip and a new front-of-shirt sponsor for the upcoming Hyundai A-League 2011/12 season after the Hyatt Regency Coolum were recently unveiled as the club's newest partner.

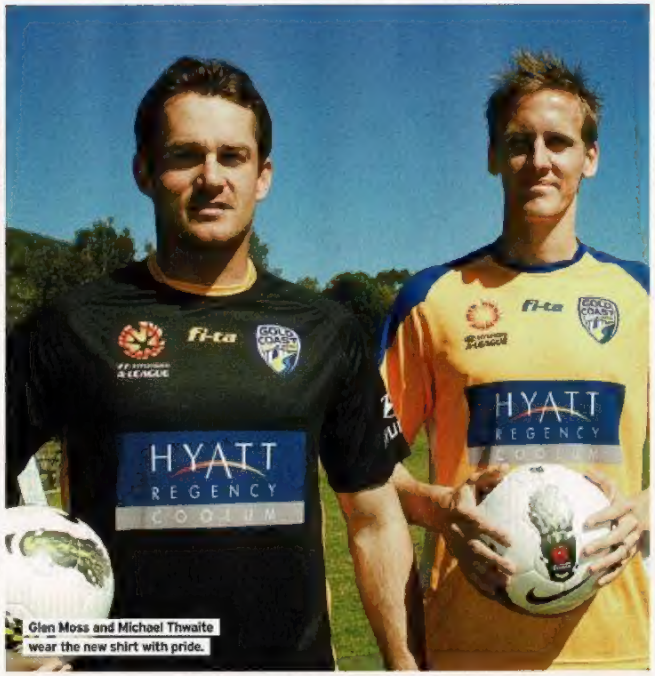
United owner Clive Palmer, who recently added the Hyatt Regency Coolum to his business portfolio, said the club's new association with the resort represented an excellent opportunity to highlight Queensland's broad appeal as one of the world's top tourism hubs, while also forming an alliance between two of his home state's most popular holiday regions.

"Queensland has some of the greatest tourist destinations in the world and both the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast epitomise what this great state is all about, so for the Hyatt Regency Coolum to be our new sponsor is a great fit," Mr Palmer said.

"The Gold and Sunshine Coasts are great places to live, but they're also fantastic places to visit and enjoy spending time with the family or doing business.

"Both our club and the Hyatt Regency Coolum are outside the state capital and represent regional and country Queensland, so there is natural synergy between us."

Gold Coast United also have a new playing kit for this season produced by Australian company Fi-ta.



Glen Moss and Michael Thwaite wear the new shirt with pride.

Street Socceroos' 2011 Homeless World Cup campaign

The Street Socceroos before they left for the 2011 Homeless World Cup.

The Street Socceroos have just competed at the 2011 Homeless World Cup in Paris.

The team joined 64 teams from 53 countries at the annual tournament which uses football to raise awareness of homelessness and help participants overcome challenges in their lives.

The Aussie team was selected from hundreds of homeless and marginalised people involved in The Big Issue's Community Street Soccer Program. Through weekly training sessions, the grassroots program helps reconnect participants with the community and works to rebuild self-esteem.

"We support football across all levels of the community and The Big Issue's program is a great example of how this sport can change lives," said FFA CEO Ben Buckley.

Josh Kennedy and the national team are coming to NSW.

NSW Govt strike hosting deal

FFA have announced a four-year partnership with the NSW Government that includes the hosting of three 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers in Sydney.

The first game under the new agreement will see the Qantas Socceroos play Oman on Tuesday, October 11 at a venue to be announced. The national team will also play two home games in the fourth round group stage in NSW, subject to qualification.

"All of Australia will be watching as our Socceroos begin the road to Brazil," NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell said.

The partnership also includes two matches from the London 2012 Olympic Games Asian qualifiers. The Qantas Olyroos are in Group B with Iraq, Uzbekistan and UAE and regional centres will be considered for hosting the matches against Uzbekistan and Iraq.

The Road To Rio

As the Qantas Socceroos eye qualification for a third consecutive FIFA World Cup, the journey to Brazil 2014 begins tonight.

A little more than 12 months after Spain created history on a magical night in Johannesburg, the first of 832 qualifiers for the 2014 FIFA World Cup kicked off around the globe.

For the Qantas Socceroos, tonight's clash signals the start of the quest for a third consecutive FIFA World Cup, set to be played out in Australia and far-off lands against nations with the same dreams as ours.

The ultimate prize is a place as one of the 32 nations at the 2014 FIFA World Cup. But more than that, it's an edition to be played in the football Mecca of Brazil. How good is that? Little wonder fans around the world are just that extra bit excited as the 'Road to Rio' comes into view.

As Australians, we know the size of the task at hand. After acceptance into the AFC in 2006, this is Australia's second qualification campaign through the Asian Football Confederation. In qualification for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the green and gold experienced some memorable clashes in far-flung places such as Kunming in China, the exotic Tashkent in Uzbekistan and Dubai against Iraq. Along the way some of the AFC's best stood in the Qantas Socceroos' path: Server Djeparov, the Uzbek creator; Iraq talisman Younis Mahmoud; and the fabulously gifted Japan playmaker Yasuhito Endo, to name but three.

But Australia proved resolute in defence, with evergreen keeper Mark Schwarzer in imperious form behind the likes of Lucas Neill and Craig Moore. And when firepower was needed, Harry Kewell, Tim Cahill and Josh Kennedy were there to help the Qantas Socceroos top their fourth round group (see the next page to explain qualification) and qualify automatically for South Africa.

Now, 12 months after Andres Iniesta's memorable strike won it for the Spaniards, the road to Brazil 2014 has opened up.

Trinidad and Tobago was the location of the first qualifier, with Belize and Montserrat squaring off. Interestingly, a little-known Melbourne-based footballer was involved in this historic match. Darryl Roach, from the second-tier Victorian Premier League club Port Melbourne, represented Montserrat in a game Belize won 5-2.

As for the Qantas Socceroos, coach Holger Osieck has Australia ticking along nicely. In his first major test, the German mentor helped Australia reach January's AFC Asian Cup 2011 final against Japan.

Subsequent victories against Germany, New Zealand and Wales have raised expectations and again shown Australia as an emerging threat on the world stage. Along the way, Osieck has methodically integrated newer faces into the fold, while still getting the best out of many veterans who helped Australia achieve back-to-back qualifications for FIFA World Cups 2006 and 2010.

But now, a campaign that will test the squad's depth, quality and temperament – not to mention the Football Federation Australia's backroom staff charged with planning the campaign – is upon us.

They say in life it's not the journey but the destination. And that's true – in the Qantas Socceroos' case it's all about Brazil. Yet along the way, this will surely be another memorable ride.

And tonight, it all starts...

Qualification ... all you need to know

A total of 4.5 spots are made available for the AFC. Qualification began with the lowest-ranked teams playing two preliminary rounds in June and July 2011.

The winners of these preliminary rounds qualified into the third round together with seeded nations such as Australia joining qualification for the first time.

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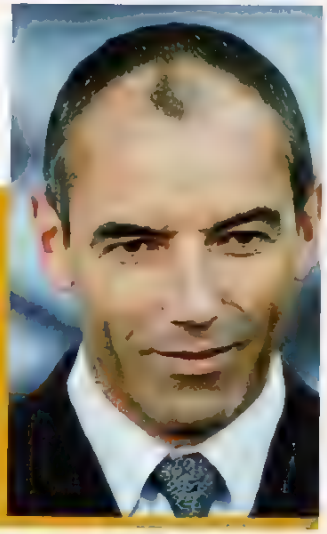
Jordan	Kuwait	Uzbekistan	Thailand	Qatar
Iraq	UAE	Syria	Saudi Arabia	Bahrain
Singapore	Lebanon	DPR Korea	Oman	Indonesia

Oman



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The former German Bundesliga player has got plenty of raw talent to work with as the Thais look to make an impression on this group despite their under-dog tag.

Thailand are known for their technical players, with playmaker Datsakorn Thonglao, attacking full-back Suree Sukha and striker Teerasil Dangda three to watch out for.

And talented former Melbourne Victory defender Surat Sukha is set to return to Australia just months after leaving the Hyundai A-League club.

Current world ranking:
119 (as of July 2011)
Main man: Teerasil Dangda

Saudi Arabia

Dutch great and former Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard recently took over as coach and the Saudis will hope he can help them rediscover their former glory.

In short it's been a disappointing few years for a nation that had been a regular qualifier for FIFA World Cups over recent decades. Nowhere was that disappointment more apparent than in their 2010 FIFA World Cup Asian qualification path.

The Saudis topped their third round group alongside the Uzbeks, but could only finish third in the 4th round qualifiers.

This meant a two-legged play-off with rivals Bahrain. After an encouraging 0-0 draw away in Manama, the Saudis conceded two goals at home at the King Fahd Stadium in dramatic fashion.

One goal was conceded in the third minute of time added-on. The late goal proved a fatal blow as the Saudis exited on the away-goals rule following the heart-breaking 2-2 draw.

However with Yasser Al Qahtani, the Saudi Arabia captain and talisman up-front, leading the charge and the respected Rijkaard at the helm, surely there are better days in store?

Current world ranking:
92 (as of July 2011)
Main man: Yasser Al Qahtani

Expert Views

On the eve of tonight's game we spoke with experts – from coaches, players and the media – about the Qantas Socceroos' chances of making it to Brazil

ANGE POSTECOGLOU

Brisbane Roar's championship-winning coach and former Qantas Young Socceroo boss says Australia must think big on the world stage

"Just qualifying isn't enough," says the Roar super-coach.

"Where we are now on the world football stage, we've got to be confident about getting through. I don't think it's an issue anymore.

"We successfully negotiated Asia in the last World Cup campaign and if you look at the world rankings, we're a country that's expected to get to the World Cup every four years. I don't think it's as much of an issue this time in terms of how we view ourselves [as a football force].

"We want to be one of the big countries in Asia, if not the number one. I think you want that tag if you want to develop as a nation. You don't want to be always going in as an underdog or being under-estimated.

"With our world rankings now, I think the expectation is we should be able to beat every team in Asia. Which is no different to how Brazil or Argentina – big football nations – see themselves.

"We need to embrace that and understand that and expect us to dominate other sides.

"I think the one thing we learnt from the last World Cup campaign is that just qualifying for the World Cup is not enough. We've got to develop a team and a style of game that we think can be successful at a World Cup itself.

"I'm sure Holger Osieck has already identified that in regenerating the team. I think you'll find in this campaign the number one goal is to qualify but I think you'll also find it's to qualify with a team and a style of game that we believe will be successful at the next World Cup.

"The tough bit is balancing this regeneration. To his credit I think Holger's managed it really well so far. You look at our Asian Cup campaign and that was really successful. He juggled the fact that he needed to keep some of the experienced players around but also slowly introduced some of the younger ones.

"I think that evolution will continue. I think also Holger's got some real options in certain areas. If a player loses form, injured or isn't playing at club level now, Holger can justifiably select someone else who we know can do the job and be just as effective.

"You're hoping that one of the young guys does jump out. It might be a Robbie Kruse or someone like him but Timmy Cahill is becoming more and more important to this. We don't really have a regular goal-scorer and Timmy is always there. He's still at the prime of his career and, like [keeper Mark] Schwarzer, he's probably the only player who is playing at the highest level regularly.

"He'll be important, as will Schwarzer and Lucas Neill at the back. With Schwarzy, you realise that age doesn't define people and he's still in great form and playing in one of the toughest leagues in the world.

"He's motivated, fit and will go on as long as he can. The national team jersey has to be earned and he's earned it. I don't see any reason why he can't keep going.

"We've had enough experience now in Asia so I don't think there are excuses any more in terms of being in Asia. We know how difficult it is and understand the logistics around it.. there can be no excuses anymore."

JOHN ALOISI

Former Qantas Socceroo great and current Melbourne Heart assistant coach likes the look of the new guard

"Holger has been brilliant for us. You saw not only with these recent results but I think we have been playing great football.

"It's of course easier to win friendly games than games you have to win in a World Cup campaign but I don't think he'll be afraid to play a Michael Zullo or a younger player like him in a qualifier.

"Robbie Kruse is another. He has that X-factor. He's quick, good on the ball and has an eye for goal. And it's good to see Holger giving him the chance.

"Let's face it, Robbie is the future for us. There are others too such as Matt Spiranovic, who for me is probably the best central defender coming through. He's great on the ball and the way we want to play, we need a good player at the back on the ball.

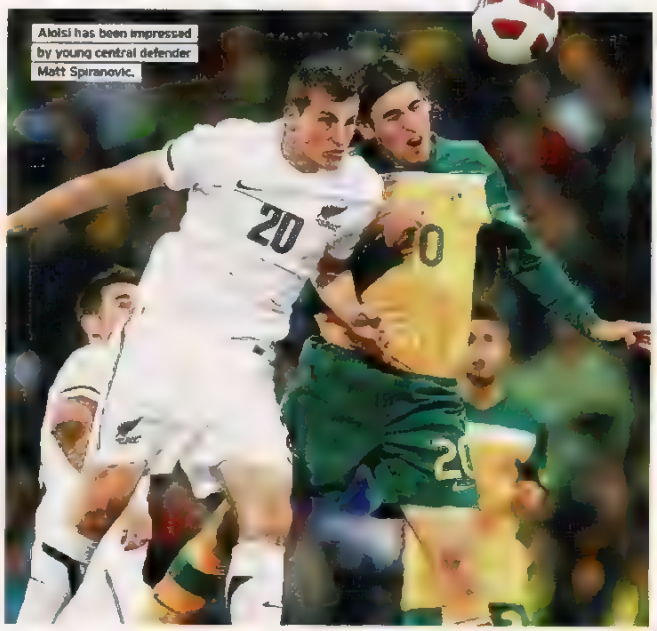
"I was surprised he didn't get an opportunity during the last World Cup campaign after being our best performer at the last Olympics. Now he has his opportunity and he's taking it. It's good to see him playing regular football in Japan, which is what he needed.

"I think we've got a great chance to qualify again, which will be amazing. We've got a few players from that last campaign so they'll know what is expected. And the more times we qualify, other nations in the AFC will be a little more afraid of us as they tend to respect bigger nations more.

"When it comes to the debate about results versus how you play in qualification, it's a bit of both. It's very important to get the results because we need to qualify, but it's also important that we play well and we keep improving as a country.

"We've got three years to improve so if we do get to the World Cup we're going to be at a top level so we can compete with the rest of the world."

"You don't just want to be scraping through to a World Cup and then not performing well on the big stage."



Aloisi has been impressed by young central defender Matt Spiranovic.

ADAM PEACOCK

Fox Sports presenter and host of Hyundai Match Day Saturday explains why he's supremely confident of qualification

"Given the recent results against Germany and Wales, I'm feeling pretty good about making it. I think we're on the right track under the right man in Holger [Osieck].

"I think the results are the be-all-and-end-all. It's nice when we play well and I think that's coming under Holger. The players all seem to be singing from the same hymn sheet and that song sounds quite positive. But it's all about results.

"If guys are coming into camp two days before we play a FIFA World Cup qualifier – like what happened on occasion during the last campaign – then the result is all that matters. Our circumstances are probably like no other Asian nation in terms of our players playing in Europe. That's our issue, the travel.

"That said, with the greatest of respect to our opponents, we should walk through the third stage of qualifiers. Who knows who we'll get in the next stage, perhaps one or two big guns so it might be a bit of an issue, but I can see us getting through to a third straight World Cup.

"Holger has a good problem to have in that he has the perfect mix of experience and youth coming through, such as [Matt] Spiranovic and [Rhys] Williams.

"They are the future and at the perfect age. I want to see Rhys play regularly. He's finding his feet and if he can stay away from injury problems then great. It will be hard to cement a spot at right back with Luke Wilkshire who's a mainstay – and rightly so – but if Holger can fit Rhys into the team somewhere...

"I'm pretty confident [of qualification]. I've already told the missus if we get through I'm going. And she can come if she wants."

Michael Zullo is one of the new breed staking a claim in the Qantas Socceroos

ANDY JACKSON

Publisher of Australian FourFourTwo magazine and au.fourfourtwo.com believes it's all about the results – anything else is a bonus

"Ultimately it is about results. There has to be one objective ultimately and that's World Cup qualification. You can say what you like about Pim Verbeek in hindsight but he navigated our first route through Asia very well - albeit not playing particularly expansive football at times. Qualification has to be the objective. If we can do it in a manner and style that we're happy with, it's a bonus.

"But I certainly agree with Ange that we need to be formulating a system that all players are comfortable with.

"We saw the danger of getting to the World Cup then asking the players to play in a completely different way in how we unravelled against Germany last year.

"Holger has the same issues as any other national team or club coach at the beginning of a qualification cycle – it's managing that evolution so it's not wholesale change.

"Look at Ferguson at Manchester United, he's a master of bringing players in but not over-exposing them too early then integrating them and knowing when they're ready to take over.

Holger's got the balance pretty much right. Matt McKay has come in and has looked at home – now he has more responsibility and starts games after being slowly introduced.

"Zullo and Spiranovic are other examples and you'd probably say they hold the shirt now in the defence. They look like they could be regulars throughout the World Cup qualifying campaign. And Matthew Leckie too, who's debuted in the Bundesliga.

"If we're not one of the top four teams in Asia – therefore missing automatic qualification for the World Cup – then alarm bells should be ringing.

"It's massive for us that we've already gone through Asia for World Cup qualification. And you're seeing that at all levels we're getting to grips with playing in Asia - be it travel, climate and lack of availability [of players].

"And of course there are potential banana skins. Changes in climate over four-day periods and club commitments, so we shouldn't take anything for granted but we should be supremely confident that we can navigate Asian qualifying every time.

"And Brazil is the romantic home of football. Every football fan I know wants to see a World Cup in Brazil.

"In a football-mad country, watch your team compete at a World Cup? Probably the only thing better would be playing in it!"

Queensland roars on road to Rio

The Sunshine State can be rightly proud of the number of players now part of the national team set-up, writes Aidan Ormond

Not only is tonight a proud one for the City of Brisbane hosting a Qantas Socceroo 2014 FIFA World Cup qualifier, but for Queensland football the number of players in the national team is a huge feather in the cap for the development system.

Heading this Sunshine State revolution is former Brisbane Roar striker and local product Robbie Kruse. He has enjoyed a breakthrough year in the green and gold, scoring against Wales last month and against Uzbekistan in the AFC Asian Cup 2011.

The 22 year old former QAS student has been long time mates with attacking defender Michael Zullo, who has also broken into the national team after coming through the Brisbane football scene and joining FC Utrecht in the Dutch Eredivisie.

And how could we forget Southport born Tommy Oar and former Brisbane Grammar student Matt McKay? McKay is already a Brisbane football legend and Oar a rising star of the game. All four are expected to feature at various times during the 2014 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers campaign.

But the aforementioned are just the tip of the iceberg. Keeper Nathan Coe is a Brisbane lad, as is newly capped Adam Sarota and established squad members Dario Vidosic, Neil Kilkenny and David Williams. Former Brisbane Striker Jon McKain is another seeing game time in the current national team.

Elsewhere around the state, star keeper Mitchell Langerak is a Bundaberg football favourite who is now a Bundesliga favourite and Brisbane Roar creator Mitch Nichols is a product of the Gold Coast.

Queenslanders have had a long history in the green and gold, from Steve Corica and Kasey Wehrman to Wayne Sivo and Clint Bolton all have adorned the national team shirt at various levels.

Now the next generation of Queenslanders are making their mark in even greater numbers than before.

Added to this the remarkable success of Brisbane Roar in both the Hyundai A-League and Westfield W-League and you'd have to say it's a great time for Queensland football.

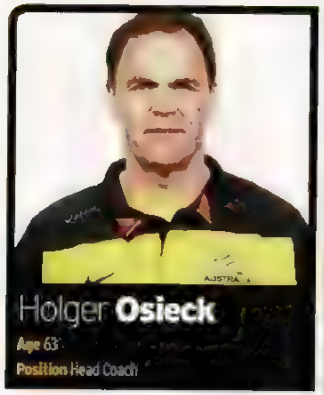
Matt McKay is one of a growing number Queenslanders in the green and gold

MEET YOUR QANTAS SOCCEROOS

Meet the squad picked by Qantas Socceroos head coach Holger Osieck for tonight's clash with Thailand

AUSTRALIA

Coach



Holger **Osieck**

Age 63
Position Head Coach

Appointed in 2010, the German-born coach enjoyed instant success by taking Australia to the AFC Asian Cup 2011 final. Despite losing, the Qantas Socceroos bounced back to defeat Germany and Wales in friendlies. His measured approach and ability to regenerate the side has won him many admirers.

FOOTBALL FEDERATON AUSTRALIA STAFF

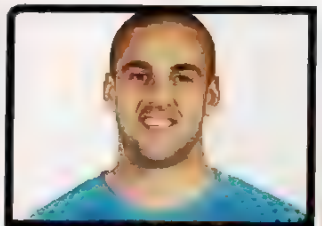
Phil Wolanski Head of Delegation
Han Berger Technical Director
Holger Osieck Head Coach
Gary Moretti Team Manager
Aurelio Vidmar Coach
Robbie Hooker Coach
Tony Franken Goalkeeping Coach
Ron Smith Analyst
Dr Mark Jones Doctor
Les Gells Senior Physiotherapist
Kurt Lisle Physiotherapist
Luke Attwell Masseur
Joel Freeme Administration Manager
Dom Rabsch Equipment Manager
Adam Mark Media Manager
Mark Saliba Security

Goalkeepers

Nathan **Coe**

Age 27 **Position** Goalkeeper
Club Sonderjysk Elitesport (Denmark)
Appearances 2

After almost a decade in Europe and Scandinavia, Coe debuted in January this year when Australia played UAE in a friendly in the Middle East. The Brisbane-born, Denmark based shot-stopper was always a talented keeper within our national youth team system and this sparked his move to Inter Milan in 2002, followed by a three-year stint at PSV in Holland.



Adam **Federici**

Age 26 **Position** Goalkeeper
Club Reading (England)
Appearances 4

"Fedders" made his full Qantas Socceroo debut in 2007 but has been restricted to just four appearances in the national side because of the amazing form of Mark Schwarzer. That said, there's no doubt that at aged 26, Federici has many more years to establish his name in the green and gold. Meanwhile he continues to catch the eye at his English Championship club Reading.

Mark **Schwarzer**

Age 38 **Position** Goalkeeper
Club Fulham (England)
Appearances 90

The Qantas Socceroos' undisputed No.1, Schwarzer is Australia's most capped men's player. After beginning his European career in Germany, Mark is now into his 15th campaign in English football at EPL side Fulham. Despite being the elder statesman of the squad, Schwarzer is showing no signs of slowing down, recently saying he would like to play in the 2014 FIFA World Cup finals.

Defenders

Luke DeVere

Age 21 **Position** Defender
Club Gyeongnam FC (Korea Republic)
Appearances -

A product of the Australian Institute of Sport, the 21 year-old is making the step -up to the full national team after impressing at youth level. After playing for three seasons with Brisbane Roar, DeVere was snapped up by K-League side Gyeongnam FC in January, where he has made over 20 appearances already. One for the future, DeVere will learn from being part of the national team set-up.

Sasa Ognenovski

Age 32 **Position** Defender
Club Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma (Korea Republic)
Appearances 10

A star in the Hyundai A-League firstly in Brisbane, then with Adelaide United, the dominating defender's career has blossomed even more since his move to Asia, where he captained his side - and scored - in an AFC Champions League final. He topped a fantastic year off by winning last season's AFC Player of the Year, before debuting in the Qantas Socceroos to round out a fabulous few years.

Rhys Williams

Age 23 **Position** Defender
Club Middlesbrough (England)
Appearances 6

A year ago Williams was set for his first ever FIFA World Cup but a persistent groin problem robbed him of his dream. However, after recently resuming his club career at Middlesbrough, he's been winning rave reviews for his great performances. He can play centrally, too, and get forward using an impressive range of skills. Williams' return in 2011 is a huge plus for the Qantas Socceroos.

Qantas Socceroos captain Lucas Neill is a rock at the back.

Defenders

Matthew Spiranovic

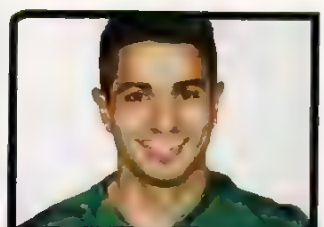
Age 23 **Position** Defender
Club Urawa Red Diamonds (Japan)
Appearances 7

Spiranovic is your classic ball-playing central defender and is a star of the future. In 2006, Spiranovic joined FC Nuremberg before moving to one of the biggest Japanese clubs Urawa Reds last year. The defender's performance last month against Wales showed that he's ready to take the next step in his international career after injuries have robbed him of game-time in the past.

Luke Wilkshire

Age 29 **Position** Defender
Club Dinamo Moscow (Russia)
Appearances 60

Wilkshire has become one of the first players on Holger Osieck's team-sheet. He's got a little bit of everything - works hard, can attack and defend and has a big heart. Wollongong-born "Wilko" began his Euro career in England with Middlesbrough and Bristol City, before a spell in Holland with FC Twente. He moved to Dinamo Moscow and has featured regularly since signing in 2008.

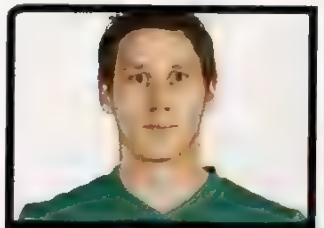


Michael Zullo

Age 22 **Position** Defender
Club FC Utrecht (Holland)
Appearances 5

Another Hyundai A-League product who is making his way in European football. Along with Robbie Kruse, the pair ripped it up at Roar between 2007-2010, which set him up for a move to FC Utrecht last year. A converted left winger, Zullo is making the most of his new role on the left side of defence, a position he's begun to play with his Dutch Eredivisie club too.

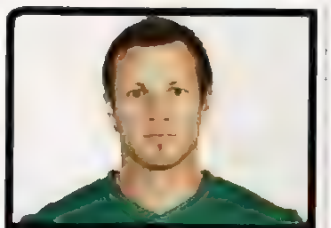
Defenders



Mark Milligan

Age 26 **Position** Defender
Club JEF United (Japan)
Appearances 8

The former Qantas Australian U-23s captain has slotted easily into Japanese football with JEF Utd. He first burst onto the scene with Northern Spirit, and did enough in the first season of the Hyundai A-League with Sydney FC to be noticed by then coach Guus Hiddink, earning a call-up to the 2006 FIFA World Cup squad. Milligan has a no-nonsense approach and can play as a defender and midfielder.



Lucas Neill

Age 33 **Position** Defender
Club Al Jazira (UAE)
Appearances 73

One of Australia's most recognisable stars, Neill recently switched from the Turkish league to UAE club Al Jazira. Neill made his Qantas Socceroos debut in 1996 and he has established himself as our defensive linchpin and leader. His performances at the AFC Asian Cup 2011 and in friendlies this year are proof that he's still at the top of his game. An inspiration and a top-class defender.

Midfielders

Brett **Emerton**

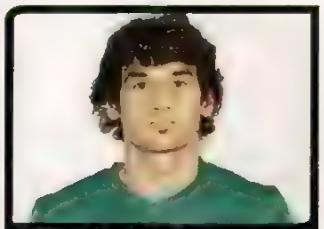
Age 32 **Position** Midfielder
Club Sydney FC (Australia)
Appearances 87

Emerton is closing in on 100 caps for the Qantas Socceroos in what's been a fantastic career. "Emmo" can always be relied on to do the job proving himself to be one of the greatest athletes we've produced in the national team. Emerton debuted in the green and gold in 1998 and had been in the EPL at Blackburn Rovers since 2003 before his high-profile move to Sydney FC last month.

Brett **Holman**

Age 27 **Position** Midfielder
Club AZ Alkmaar (Holland)
Appearances 48

A sensational last 12 months has taken Holman's green and gold career to another level. Holman was always hugely important to the team with his willingness to do the hard yards and now after a flurry of goals, including two at the 2010 FIFA World Cup, he's shaping up as another match-winner for Holger Osieck. The Sydney-sider debuted for the green and gold in 2006.



Mile **Jedinak**

Age 27 **Position** Midfielder
Club Crystal Palace (England)
Appearances 27

Jedinak's AFC Asian Cup 2011 was a breakthrough tournament for the midfielder, with a brace of goals at crucial times and a dominant series of displays. The former Hyundai A-League star has played in the Turkish league but is now developing his game with Crystal Palace under former Qantas Socceroo Tony Popovic, who is an assistant at the London club.

Mile Jedinak enjoyed a brilliant AFC Asian Cup 2011 tournament.

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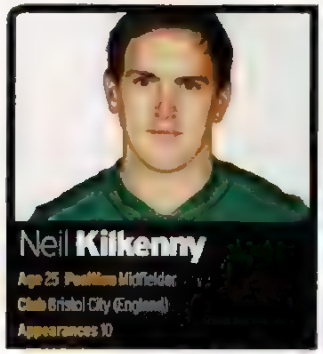
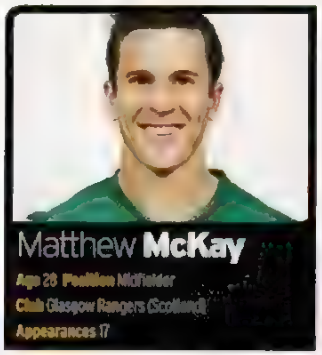
Midfielders



Neil **Kilkenny**

Age 25 **Position** Midfielder
Club Bristol City (England)
Appearances 10

Kilkenny, now with Bristol City, is building his career in England after successful spells with Leeds United and Birmingham City. For the green and gold, he debuted in 2006 and is now in a good position to cement his place after being picked in the AFC Asian Cup 2011 squad. Kilkenny combines work-rate with an excellent technical ability which he developed as an apprentice at Arsenal



Matthew **McKay**

Age 28 **Position** Midfielder
Club Glasgow Rangers (Scotland)
Appearances 17

One of the feel-good stories of Australia's AFC Asian Cup 2011 campaign, McKay has blossomed under Osieck, slotting into the team like a veteran and adding a new dimension to the midfield. With his prodigious work-rate and excellent link-play, the Roar hero was recently signed by Glasgow Rangers after he gained his clearance to play for the Scottish giants in the SPL.

James **Troisi**

Age 23 **Position** Midfielder
Club Kayserispor Kulubu (Turkey)
Appearances 6

An Adelaide product, Troisi has been overseas for his entire senior career. He began at England's Newcastle United where he played in the reserves and was on the fringes of the first team before a move to Turkey came up. He plied his trade at Gençlerbirligi, before catching the eye of Kayserispor after banging in a hat-trick against them playing for Gençler.

Midfielders

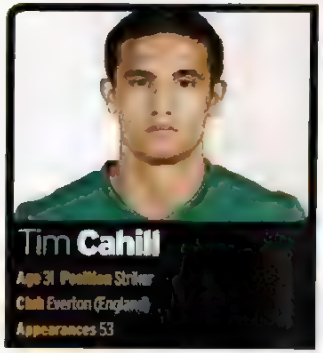
Carl **Valeri**

Age 27 **Position** Midfielder
Club US Sassuolo Calcio (Italy)
Appearances 39

Canberra-raised Valeri has refined his game in Italy and is delivering big-time in the Qantas Socceroo midfield. The defensive midfielder has represented Australia at all levels and made his debut for the Qantas Socceroos in March 2007. Valeri was signed by Inter Milan in 2004, who loaned him out to other clubs to gain experience, before he signed with Serie B team US Sassuolo in 2010.

Matt McKay is now an important part of the Australian midfield.

Strikers



Tim **Cahill**

Age 31 **Position** Striker
Club Everton (England)
Appearances 53

Australia's first ever World Cup goal-scorer - who could forget those last minute strikes against Japan in Kaiserslautern? - Cahill is now played predominantly as a striker by coach Osieck, such is his ability to find the net in big games. One of the few Aussies left in the EPL, Tim is arguably as valuable to Everton's fortunes as he is to the green and gold's. Dead-set legend.

Robbie **Kruse**

Age 22 **Position** Striker
Club Fortuna Dusseldorf (Germany)
Appearances 8

This year has been Kruse's after the lightning quick striker was named in the AFC Asian Cup squad in January. It was just reward for some sparkling displays at Melbourne Victory and he off a year to remember by inking a deal with German club Fortuna Dusseldorf. In June he headed overseas for his first Euro pre-season after the recent home friendlies against New Zealand and Serbia.

Josh **Kennedy**

Age 29 **Position** Striker
Club Nagoya Grampus (Japan)
Appearances 23

Kennedy is currently the leading scorer in the J-League with powerhouse Nagoya Grampus. Coached by former playing great Dragan Stojkovic, the tall centre forward has made a splash in Japan since joining his club in 2009, following almost seven years in the German leagues. Kennedy also made a splash with the national team at the 2006 FIFA World Cup, helping Australia make the group stages.

Strikers

Adam **Sarota**

Age 22 **Position** Striker
Club FC Utrecht (Holland)
Appearances 1

Sarota was probably the least heralded of the Brisbane Roar trio - along with Tommy Oar and Michael Zullo - to sign with FC Utrecht last season, but he's made the biggest impact at the Eredivisie club so far. A midfielder by trade, Sarota can get into more advanced positions and use his skill on the ball to link-up with the forwards. Another player who has a bright future ahead of them.

Alex **Brosque**

Age 27 **Position** Striker
Club Shimizu S-Pulse (Japan)
Appearances 6

Brosque has enjoyed a successful first season in Japan. It's this form and Brosque's versatility - he can lead the line or play just in behind in a 4-3-3 - that makes the former Sydney FC and Queensland Roar star such a valuable asset. At 27 he is at the peak of his powers and playing in the highly technical and pacy J-League can only boost his future chances in the green and gold.

AUSTRALIA V THAILAND

Fill in numbers as line-ups are announced

GOALKEEPERS

- [illegible]athan **Coe**
- [illegible]dam **Federici**
- [illegible]ark **Schwarzer**

DEFENDERS

- Lucas **Neill**
- Mark **Milligan**
- Matthew **Spiranovic**
- Luke **Wilkshire**
- Rhys **Williams**
- Luke **DeVere**
- Sasa **Ognenovski**
- Michael **Zullo**

MIDFIELDERS

- Matthew **McKay**
- James **Troisi**
- Brett **Holman**
- Mile **Jedinak**
- Carl **Valeri**
- Neil **Kilkenny**
- Brett **Emerton**

FORWARDS

- Tim **Cahill**
- Scott **McDonald**
- Josh **Kennedy**
- Robbie **Kruse**
- Adam **Sarota**

GOALSCORERS

FORWARDS

- Teerasil Dangda
- Wuthichai Tathong
- Surachart Sareepan
- Chartrer Chimtalay
- Sompong Soheo

DEFENDERS

- Suttinun Phukhom
- Chonlatit Jantakam
- Suree Sukha
- Niweat Siriwong
- Prathum Chuthong
- Phairoon Tiebma
- Supachai Komsil
- Teerathorn Boonmathan

MIDFIELDERS

- Adul Lasoh
- Pokklao Anan
- Surat Sukha
- Apipoo Sunthornpanavej
- Phichitpong Cheuichiu
- Rangsan Vivatchaichok
- Suchao Nutnum
- Datsakorn Thonglao
- Jakkraphan Kaewprom

GOALKEEPERS

- Sivaruk Thedsungnern
- Kawin Thammasatchanan
- Sinthaweechai Hathairattanakool
- Chatchai Butprom

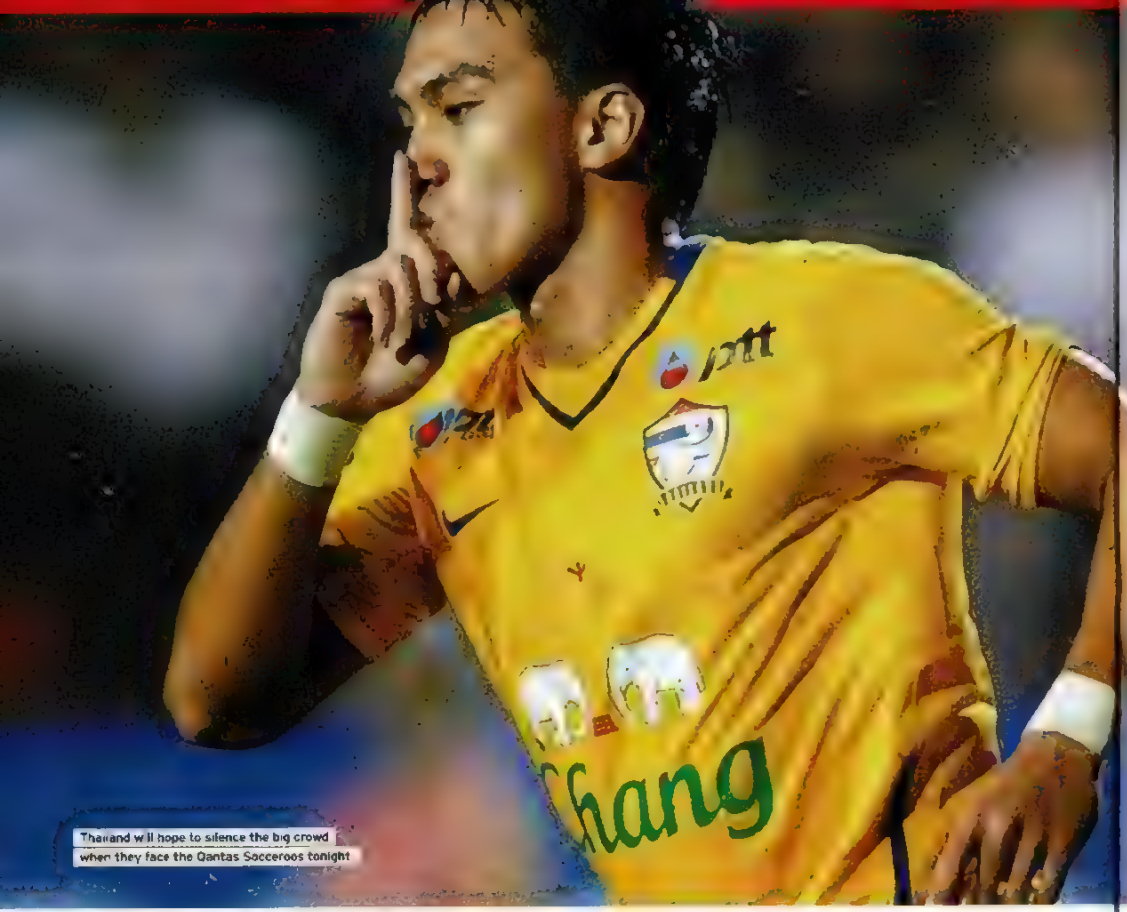
GOALSCORERS

PROFILE: THAILAND

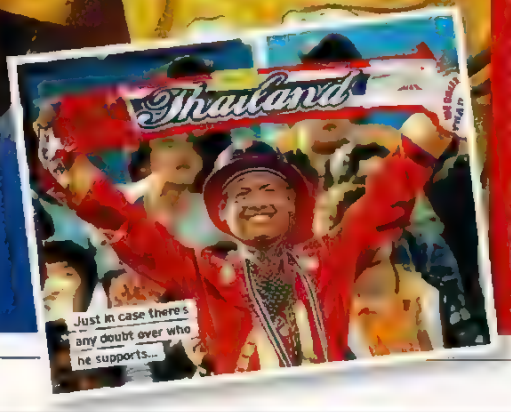
THAILAND

Thailand impressed last time they played Australia and now – under a new German manager – their high-energy, skillful brand of football should provide a stern test for the Qantas Socceroos.

Words Aldan Ormond



Thailand will hope to silence the big crowd when they face the Qantas Socceroos tonight



Just in case there's any doubt over who he supports...

In Thailand that rainy and humid night, the Rajamangala Stadium would have witnessed a much closer contest than the 4-0 scoreline. In Australia's final group game of the AFC Asian Cup 2007, the green and gold scored three times in the final minutes to confirm the

On the pitch that night for the Qantas Socceroos was striker and 2006 FIFA World Cup hero John Aloisi. "The result was flattering," he said. "They had a lot of control of the game and were actually very dangerous

The Thais also have a gritty edge to their play

Pride and passion has never been an issue for the Thais

DID YOU KNOW? Thailand's kit is traditionally red but they also play in a yellow version to honour their King

With football the number one sport in Thailand, emotions are high when the Thais play

said Aloisi, who has since retired and is now on the coaching staff at Hyundai A-League club Melbourne Heart.

Thailand are currently ranked 119 in the world but it's a statistic that's somewhat misleading. Theirs is a side filled with some genuinely talented footballers who've caught the eye of such football greats as Bryan Robson – the former England and Manchester United legend who, until recently, was Thailand's national team coach.

In new manager, Winfried Schafer, Thailand have a coach with a winning mentality. And he's got the trophies to prove it. Perhaps the German trainer is exactly the sort of manager the Thais need to take their football to the next level? "A German with a lot of experience, he'll make sure they get that (the tactical side) right," added Aloisi.

Thailand began their 2014 FIFA World Cup journey in the second round of qualifiers with a 3-2 aggregate victory over Palestine. The Palestinians were no match for the Thais, who took the advantage in the home first leg 1-0, courtesy of a Jakkraphan Kaewprom goal.

In the return leg in the West Bank, the Thais dug deep after some late drama. The home side took a 2-1 lead in the 90th minute before the talented Datsakorn Thonglao made it a brace on the night with a last gasp 95th minute goal to send the Thais through.

So with this as a confidence booster, what are we to make of tonight's Thais?

Skilful Thonglao is clearly a danger. In a five-man midfield he is given license to link-up with the forward line and to use his vision as a playmaker to prize open opposition back-lines.

The creative 27-year-old may not have the engines of some of his team-mates but he can change a game with a pass. In short, he is the playmaker the Thais look to for moments of magic in opening up defences. Thonglao's two goals against Palestine proof of his threat from deep. He's also the set-piece taker for the national side.

Once linked with a move to the Hyundai A-League, he is formerly of Vietnamese club Hoàng Anh Gia Lai and Thai side BEC Tero Sasana. These days Thonglao is team-mates with Robbie Fowler and Co. at cashed-up Thai powerhouse Muangthong United, while at national team level he is edging closer to 100 caps.

Elsewhere, a familiar face for Hyundai A-League fans is set to anchor the Thai midfield. Former Melbourne Victory favourite Surat Sukha will be pivotal in the centre of midfield, while his brother is right back Suree Sukha, an all-action defender who pushes forward at every chance (this is the man who put on an eye-catching performance against the Qantas Socceroos in 2007).

At the back Nattaporn Panrit captains the side, providing organisational skills and leadership, while young goalkeeper Kawin Thammasajanan has been linked with a move to England in recent times and is highly regarded.

The Thai Premier League has been on a high in recent years as money seeps back into the local game. Fowler's arrival at ambitious Muangthong United – bankrolled by a large media organization – is a clear sign that things are changing for the better in a league that features teams with such exotic names as Thai Port Authority and Bangkok Glass.

"Thailand have the technical ability to hurt Australia if they are given the time and space"

Supporting Thailand can be a head-spinner for their passionate fans.

Striker Teerasil Dangda is a great example of a Thai player re-igniting his career at home. He's been linked with a trial at QPR in recent months and when Manchester City was owned by Thaksin Shinawatra, he and two other Thai stars were signed by the club. However with work permit issues complicating things, the trio had to be farmed out.

Dangda's two years in Europe yielded very little return and he soon returned to the burgeoning local leagues. Since then he has made up for lost time, becoming one of the most dangerous strikers in the TPL with 23 goals. On national team duty, Dangda has scored 17 times in 36 games.

Even if he's not a household name, we shouldn't be taking him or Thailand lightly.

"We tend to disregard a lot of these (south-east Asian) nations because we don't know a lot about their football and pass them off as minnows of football," said Brisbane Roar title-winning coach and former Qantas Young Socceroo boss Ange Postecoglou. "Realistically they're not thinking about qualifying for a World Cup but during this campaign, if they can knock off one or two of the bigger teams, it helps them progress and develop their game.

"Every team in Asia can play football, if you give them the time and space. And Thailand have technical ability to hurt you if given that time and space. They'll be a handful for sure and they'll see playing Australia as a big game for them. From a motivation point of view, Australia would be a massive scalp for them," he said.

Postecoglou is absolutely right. Make no mistake, the Thais can play, even while they continue to fine-tune that hard-nosed edge needed at this level.

Like Australia, Thailand have turned to a German to guide them and you could say that 'Winnie' is a winner. A scan of his coaching career reveals as much. The biggest triumph for the now 61 year-old is an African Cup of Nations medal with Cameroon, when they won the title in 2002.

A year after he guided the same country to the Confederations Cup Final only to lose to host nation France courtesy of a Thierry Henry winner (though the final was overshadowed by the death in the semis of Cameroon's Marc Vivien Foe).

Later, Schafer held aloft the UAE title with Al Ahli in 2006 and won three cups with Al Ain. ▸

Surat Sukah in action against Melbourne Victory in an AFC Champions League clash.

Twin Thai threats

The Sukah brothers could be key tonight

The Thai team features two of the Sukah brothers, Melbourne Victory fans can tell you all about Surat (above), the feisty, hard-working midfielder who caught the eye of a number of the AFC Champions League and ended up being the first Thai to ply his trade in the Hyundai A-League.

In recent months Surat returned to Thailand to play for Buriram PEA. In the national team the 29-year-old is usually positioned as a defensive midfielder, offering cover to his twin brother, Suree, who regularly bombs forward from the right side of defence.

Suree was one of three Thai players signed by Manchester City in 2007 and was one of the stars for Thailand the last time they played the Qantas Socceroos at the AFC Asian Cup in 2007.

Capped around 50 times for his country, Suree is a Chonburi legend, having played around 200 times for the club over two stints during his career.

The brothers will need to be on top form – as will Thonglao and Dangda – if Thailand are to come away from Brisbane with a good result.

Thai forward Teerasil Dangda (centre) is one to watch out for in this campaign.

including the UAE Super Cup. In Germany, the former Borussia Monchengladbach stalwart is remembered for guiding Karlsruhe to the UEFA Cup semi-finals in the early 1990s.

After the Robson era, some are saying the German is just the sort of character to bring the best out in Thailand, although Schafer is taking on a country that has a somewhat erratic results history.

Going way back in time, Thailand played at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics but were beaten 9-0 by Great Britain's football team. Down 4-0 after just 30 minutes, they held out admirably till the 75th minute before another avalanche of goals from the Brits.

It wasn't until 1998 that the Thais reached their high water mark, a ranking of 45 in the world. And just nine years ago they made it to the last round of 2002 FIFA World Cup Asian qualifiers, on the back of their U-17 national teams qualifying for the FIFA U-17 tournaments in 1997 and 1999.

But as of last month, Thailand were ranked 119 and have never qualified for a senior FIFA World Cup since their first qualification campaign 27 years ago. In 2010 FIFA World Cup qualifying, the Thais eliminated Macau and Yemen to reach the third round, before finishing bottom of a group featuring Japan, Bahrain and Oman.

But they have achieved the occasional result of some note. "Teams like Thailand,

"Don't underestimate them. The Thais are a gritty type of footballer who can get stuck in"

you just don't know," said former Qantas Socceroo Alan Davidson, capped 76 times and a member of the FFA Hall of Champions. "They're a football nation that is developing and we expect to beat them but you have really got to grind out the result. On the day you just don't know what might happen," he added.

Davidson, a former Malaysian M-League star, cites two examples of the Thais' ability to deliver the occasional surprise.

First was their win on penalties against Australia in the final of the 2009 AFF U-19 championships. "They played them off the park that day," recalled Davidson.

"Don't underestimate them. For Thailand to beat Australia at youth level is an indication they're a good footballing nation coming through with some quality players.

"They're a gritty type of footballer who can get stuck in and mix it, which is something you're not generally accustomed to seeing in south east Asia. Technically they're good, too."

Davidson also pointed to Thai club BEC Tero Sasana's run all the way to the 2003 AFC Asian Champions League final - just losing out to west Asian power Al Ain - as an example of a league growing in quality and stature.

"The Thai Premier League is starting to flourish. They've got some formidable results. All indicators are that these aren't like the old days. That Asian Champions League result was proof of that - these are indicators that they can play," he said.

Prior to 2007, the Qantas Socceroos played Thailand twice during the 1980s. In 1982, there was a 4-0 victory for the Aussies in Singapore at the inaugural Merlion Cup. A year later and they won again, this time 2-0 in a 'B' international.

No doubt tonight on home soil the Qantas Socceroos will be expected to record a similarly positive result. But the Thais will relish the occasion, too. There will be few expectations and when in possession they will hope to express themselves and break with pace and skill on the pristine Brisbane turf.

With quite a few fans expected, Thailand will aim to make this opening FIFA World Cup qualifier a joyous one for their colourful and passionate supporters.

It'll be a tricky night for the home nation as the Thais aim to surprise.

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THAILAND 0 - AUSTRALIA 4

DATE: JULY 16, 2007 WHERE: RAJAMANGALA NATIONAL STADIUM, BANGKOK COMPETITION: AFC ASIAN CUP 2007 GROUP STAGE

Carney and Culina contain the threat

Aussie fans enjoyed their night in Bangkok

Viduka strikes late in the game

In Australia's final group game, Qantas Socceroo greats Mark Viduka and Harry Kewell smashed three late goals to help see off a determined Thailand in a 4-0 victory at a rain-soaked Rajamangala Stadium.

The Australians started with key men Kewell and Timmy Cahill in reserve and it proved a masterstroke on a night when the Thais showed how dangerous they can be on home soil.

The starting XI put out by Australia coach Graham Arnold deservedly took the lead after a strong start. On 20 minutes defender Michael Beauchamp's header from a set piece gave the visitors the early advantage.

The Aussies were buzzing in Bangkok but the tournament co-hosts worked hard to get back into the contest. Thai star Suree Sukha was a constant threat with his all-action display down the right, while Totchtawan Sripan and Kiatisuk Senamuang were also dangerous throughout the night in front of a boisterous crowd of 46,000

And the crowd was on its feet when Suchao Nutnum went close and Senamuang's classy back-heel set-up Pipat Thonkanya but his shot was directed straight at Aussie keeper Mark Schwarzer

However the Qantas Socceroo defence held firm as young Mark Milligan blended an impressive work-rate with class on the ball.

Datsakorn Thonglao had a long-range effort but the inventive and livewire Thais couldn't convert And with the home side losing key defender Kiatpruwat Siaweao to injury later in the game, it weakened their last line and on 80 minutes the Qantas Socceroos made them pay with some clinical finishing.

Substitute Cahill's cross found Viduka near the goal, and he took the ball on his chest, held-off Niweat Siriwong and deftly scored the Aussies' second of the night. The big striker then confirmed the result with a powerful header three minutes later with Cahill again the provider from wide.

The result confirmed a quarter-final showdown for the Qantas Socceroos against Japan in Vietnam – a nation they'd played just a year earlier at the 2006 FIFA World Cup famously defeating them 3-1 for their first ever World Cup victory

Kewell, a late substitute like Cahill, capped off the night in injury time by bursting through a tiring defence and slotting under keeper Kosin Hathairatanakool to wrap up the four goal victory. ●

AUSTRALIA'S LINE-UP

Team Schwarzer, Culina, Beauchamp, Emerton, Wilkshire, Viduka (Holman 84), Grella, Aloisi (Harry Kewell 61), Carney, Milligan, Bresciano (Cahill 74)

"Why I'll make Brazil 2014"

Qantas Socceroos captain Lucas Neill has no intention of handing over his armband with the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil still three years away

Words Cameron Brown

From Australia's first friendly back in June 1922 up until the 2006 FIFA World Cup, only the 1974 squad played at a FIFA World Cup finals during that 84 year period. Qantas Socceroos captain Lucas Neill now plans to play three consecutive tournaments - two quite possibility as captain – in just 12 years.

That is the current footballing landscape in Australia. We now expect to be one of the top 32 nations competing at the FIFA World Cup. So when we sat down with the recent Al Jazira FC signing, it was not a case of just reminiscing about South Africa last year and the AFC Asian Cup final against Japan, it was about looking forward to another major tournament in three years' time.

A gruelling campaign through the AFC awaits. A campaign that the 50th captain of the Qantas Socceroos is ready to power through and claim the prize of FIFA World Cup football once again.

There is no talk of not making it.

It is entirely plausible that Neill, who will be 36 in Brazil, will be able fulfil his desire. Physically fit and never one to overly rely on pace, Neill has that invaluable knack of reading the game and positioning himself correctly ahead of approaching attacks.

We discussed the year since the 2010 FIFA World Cup, working under a new Qantas Socceroos coach, making Brazil and a "horrible season" at former club Galatasaray.

The last time we spoke it was before the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa and we chatted about the feeling of leading your nation out at a major tournament. Now it has happened, what was it like doing just that against Germany in our opening game?

It was truly a proud time. It surpasses all your dreams, that knowledge that you are the first to walk out – it is just an amazing feeling. With that comes a little bit of responsibility and I probably took it a little bit too personally that we didn't qualify for the second round, but I'm not going to let that tarnish the fact that I am one of a very lucky few that captained their country at a FIFA World Cup.

A year has passed since the FIFA World Cup, with such time for clarity, how do you assess South Africa?

I still think we did amazingly well – we just got off to a less than impressive start. Hindsight is always a wonderful thing, but perhaps at 2-0 down and with a man sent off we should have just said, "right, let's just lose this game 2-0," but it's never been in our nature to do that.

We are starting to learn that it's not really about the performances, it's about getting to each stage, and we really took that concept onboard at the AFC Asian Cup where it was just about taking small steps at a time to making sure we were always in the next game, or the next round. Maybe we needed to make some honest mistakes to learn that. We played so well against Ghana, particularly with 10 men, and should have won that game. Then it was an amazing spirited performance against Serbia, but what was more surprising is that Germany didn't do us a favour in the other game. Look at Uruguay, who ended up being in the last four of the World Cup, a team that we have beaten in a pressure situation before. So, it's one of those things, another one of those tournaments where it's a "what if?", but still we have been to another FIFA World Cup and you can't take that away from us.

Luckily we had the AFC Asian Cup soon after! What was the key to going on that run to the final?

The mindset when we got there was to learn from each tournament. The attitude of teams that are successful in tournaments is to make sure they do just enough in the early stages to keep being in amongst it, keep advancing, and then obviously when it comes to crunch time, take advantage.

We did everything we could to win the tournament but on the night didn't execute. We created plenty of opportunities and apart from one out-of-character defensive mistake (Japan's winner in the final), we were faultless in the tournament. And for me especially, I was disappointed I didn't get to lift the cup, not just for myself, but on behalf of the country and all the guys. ▸

"Then you have the $49 cap..."

Plus a lot of people that have a put a lot of hard work into the game for a number of years. It would have been a sweet moment.

What is it like working under Socceroos coach Holger Osieck? What type of coach is he?
Very open, very honest, but I've been the same with all my managers. He [Holger] has been around long enough in football, in so many different environments, that he never gets over fazed by any situation. He never gets carried away and he never worries too much, he breathes an amazing amount of confidence in the squad and I think that's evident by the fact that he's willing to play younger players in big games too. He makes those youngsters feel like they're good enough and gives them the belief that they can go out and perform. And he's just a guy with tremendously good tactical knowledge as well, all without complicating the game.

The AFC Asian Cup ended in disappointment. Was that made all the harder as it was the last chance for this 'Golden Generation' to win a major tournament?
A lot of the guys didn't know how to respond to losing the final because we were so determined and so sure we were going to win when we got to the final, without being over-confident. A lot of players will be thinking long and hard now about when does the next chance come? It's up to your body, how long it is going to allow you to get selected. If that means getting to the next FIFA World Cup, which realistically we are not going to win, that would be something phenomenal. Just getting to the FIFA World Cup and getting out of the group stages is an achievement every time you go to a World Cup. And then anything's possible once you are in the knock-out stages. But then beyond that is an AFC Asian Cup in Australia, which would be amazing, but I suppose a lot of people think that's probably a year or two too far [for me].

Lucas and Sasa get revenge over Germany.

"Nobody is going to get my spot in a hurry, I'm simply not willing to give it up"

Sasa Ognenovski and yourself looked accomplished at the back but is that pairing a long-term solution considering where both of you are in your careers?
It is as long-term a pairing as it is allowed to be! Sasa has come into the team late in his career, but looks like he's been playing there for years. I certainly struck off an instant understanding with him. But as much as we're trying to hold onto our own spots, we have equally been trying to offer experience to those coming through too. Nobody is going to get my spot in a hurry, I'm simply not willing to give it up and I'm sure Sasa will say the same.

Neill has moved on from Gala to Al Jazira in the UAE.

So the 2014 FIFA World Cup is still very mucha target for you?
100 per cent! With the year I've had, with the AFC Asian Cup I had and the physical conditioning I've put myself through this season – I know I can play three or four more years. Both Harry [Kewell] and I have worked very hard on our fitness and game, which was evident in the way we both played in the AFC Asian Cup in January. It really paid off and we're ready to extend our careers by as long as possible.

Who can you see emerging in that centre-back position for Australia to either play alongside you or compete for your position?
There are so many. It's unfair to name anyone. I don't want to put them under pressure. It is just getting them out there and playing regularly and performing.

Lucas gets to grips with the Italians at the 2006 FIFA World Cup.

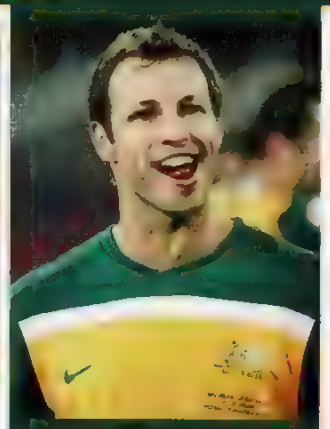
Just onto last season, it was not a great one at your former club in Turkey, Galatasaray...
That's being polite – it was a horrible season! I went to Istanbul and joined one of Europe's bigger teams and while you can't assume you will finish in the top three every year, it is expected and usually achieved. It is hard to put your finger on it. Possibly the chemistry of the team wasn't right; the attitude was all wrong going in. Everything that could have gone wrong, went wrong! Including key players getting injured.

They were a demanding bunch at Gala. What was the fan reaction like?
They were more accepting of it than they probably should have been. I shared their frustration and it is sad because a club with 25 million fans deserves so much more, and they're still willing to come out every week to support their team. They deserve glory, they deserve to be playing for trophies.

What about on a personal level, how have you been playing in 2011?
Last season was a one that builds character and it's never too late in your career to do that, but it's not why I went there. I went there to try and challenge for trophies and titles. The team is going to need to rebuild now and I'm really not at a time in my life where I want to be in a team that rebuilds.

How was it playing with your Qantas Socceroo teammate Harry Kewell in Turkey?
That was the only thing that kept us both going. Plus having an Australian physio called David Joyce with us, who had done extra work and made us work for ourselves to become better and fitter. That was a saving grace really. To have each other there and to keep things a little bit Australian, keep things English and to make sure no matter how down it got, we never got down on each other and put a smile on each other's faces... ◦

Lucas is an ambassador for Optus Small Sided Football Awards. Head to www.optus.com.au/football for more information.



LIFE AFTER FOOTBALL?

Qantas Socceroo captain on his post-football plans

How much thought have you given to your career after football? Will you be getting the necessary coaching badges?
I'm looking at getting them now, not that I need them but because you have to get them. I want to put a lot back into grassroots football and there are a few little projects that I want to do on the side away from sport too. So I've got some focus but sport is always going to be my main focus plus obviously football, especially in Australia. I want to be able to pass on my experiences and things that I've learnt and the dos and don'ts. I'd be wasting my experience if I didn't.

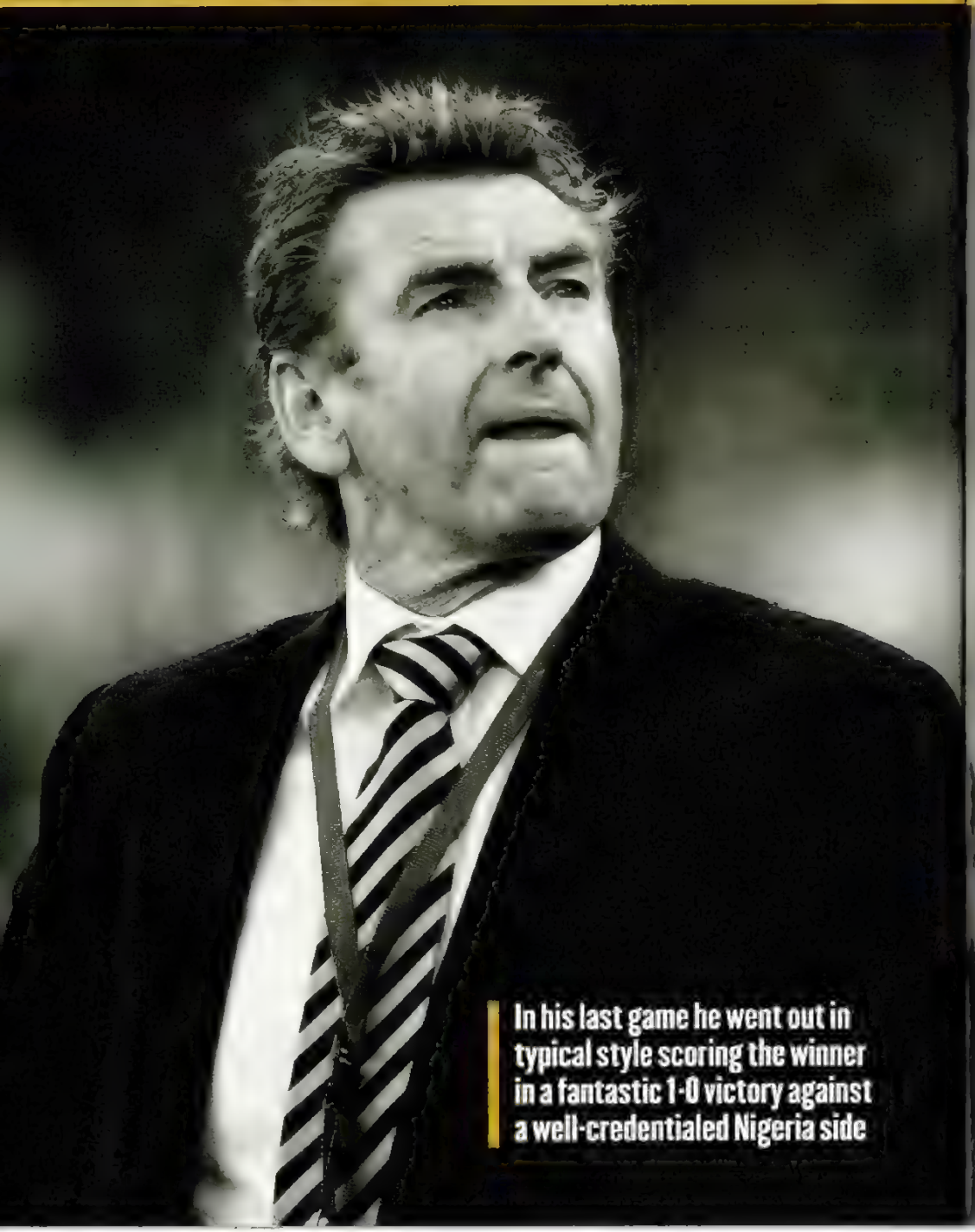
Do you see yourself as a head coach or perhaps a youth coach?
Tough one, I don't know if I want be a manager of men or a developer of young boys and I think at the moment I'm looking more towards the latter.

Does the Hyundai A-League appeal as a starting point in your coaching career?
Possibly yes. It won't be an easy way to get in because there are some good coaches in Australia but it certainly makes sense.

ROOS SLAY WELSH DRAGON

STRIKERS ON TARGET IN LAST TEST BEFORE 2014 FIFA WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

The Qantas Socceroos took another scalp when Holger Osieck's men won 2-1 against Wales last month with Tim Cahill and Robbie Kruse netting at Cardiff City's new stadium. The Everton talisman broke the deadlock on the stroke of half-time before the Fortuna Dusseldorf forward made it two on 60 minutes. The home side pulled one back but the Qantas Socceroos held on for a deserved win and remain undefeated against European opposition in 2011.



In his last game he went out in typical style scoring the winner in a fantastic 1-0 victory against a well-credentialed Nigeria side

LEGENDS: JOHN KOSMINA

LEGENDS

JOHN KOSMINA

National team legend, NSL superstar and one-time Arsenal player - we pay tribute to the striker known simply as "Kossie"

Words Aidan Ormond

"He was a great ambassador for the code and a good Socceroo who represented everything that was typified in those days of the Australian spirit."

Those are the words of Qantas Socceroo great Alan Davidson about ex-team-mate John Kosmina, whose contributions to Australian football has spanned four decades and counting.

Chiefly these contributions are as one of Australia's top international and club players (see stats box). The South Australian later transitioned into coaching at NSL and Hyundai A-League level and was also in the dugout of the Qantas Socceroos as an assistant at the 2007 AFC Asian Cup.

Kosmina is a name deservedly added to the Football Federation Australia Hall of Fame as one of the inaugural inductees.

The blond South Australia striker is best remembered for his goals in the national team. He debuted a few months shy of his 20th birthday against Bologna in his hometown of Adelaide - a 3-0 victory for the Aussies in 1976.

Twelve years later Kosmina called time on his national team career after representing Australia at the 1988 Seoul Olympics. In his last game, he went out in typical style scoring the winner in a fantastic 1-0 victory against a well-credentialed Nigeria.

He was subbed off with six minutes to go. The applause from the Australian bench said it all - they knew how much Kosmina had given. In those 12 memorable years Kosmina lead the Qantas Socceroo line admirably, playing in three FIFA World Cup qualifying campaigns (1977, 1981 and 1985), though sadly he never appeared at a FIFA World Cup).

Yet despite playing for Australia in an era when the Qantas Socceroos were tagged as the under-dog, Kosmina managed to find the net against some of the best defences and defenders in the world. In 1984, for example, Kosmina - then 28 and at the peak of his powers - got on the score sheet in friendly games against Glasgow Rangers, Nottingham Forest, Iraklis and Manchester City.

The following year Kossie bagged a brace against Brazil's Vasco De Gama, and scored in

Leading the line for the Qantas Socceroos during his 12-year green and gold career

KOSSIE'S CAREER STATS

Full name: John Alexander Kosmina **Born:** August 17 1956 **Birthplace:** Adelaide **Qantas Socceroos:** 100 appearances ('A' and 'B' matches) **Goals:** 42 **Clubs:** West Adelaide, Arsenal, Sydney City, Sydney Olympic, APIA Leichhardt **Goals:** 133 **Clubs coached:** Newcastle, Brisbane Strikers, Adelaide United, Sydney FC **International:** Qantas Socceroo assistant coach 2007

full internationals against Israel, New Zealand and Chinese Taipei (against whom he banged in a hat-trick). The powerful forward also played against tonight's opponents Thailand in the inaugural 1982 Merlion Cup in Singapore. And sure enough, he was on target again with a brace in the 4-0 win.

That was an Australian side that featured Alan Davidson in defence. "In terms of being a footballer, Kossie was obviously great," Davidson, a former South Melbourne and Nottingham Forest player, said. "He did a great job in playing for and captaining the country. And since then he's gone into the coaching arena and I think he's done really well at Adelaide and got some great results there."

"What you see is what you get with Kossie. He was a colourful character; straight down the line and basically said what he thought.

"But he could play. He was on the books at Arsenal at one point. He was one of the guys

He did a great job of playing for and captaining the country... and he had that winning mentality

who pioneered the way of going to Europe. Kossie was competitive and he had that winning mentality and when he was captain, he was a good leader too."

At club level, Kosmina, now 55, made his name in the old National Soccer League with West Adelaide. So promising was he that the Gunners signed him up when he was just 21. The high-profile move made Kosmina one of the first Australians in the modern era to ply their trade in Europe (although he made just one sub appearance for the London club).

The Qantas Socceroo returned to South Australia soon after his UK adventure but a few years later he was to join another powerful club in Sydney City. It was here his career took off at arguably the most Aussie successful club of the 1980s. One man who remembers Kosmina during that era was Brisbane Roar coach Ange Postecoglou.

As a raw 18-year-old, Postecoglou made his senior NSL debut for South Melbourne against City. And lining up against him on that day was none other than Kosmina – by that stage a Qantas Socceroo hero and already established as one of great strikers of the league. It was quite an introduction, as the Hyundai A-League Grand Final winning coach recalled...

"They were the top team going around at the time, led by Kossie at the forefront of it."

Helping the next generation at the AFC Asian Cup 2007

Winning the Premiers Plate with his beloved Adelaide United

Postecoglou told The Socceroo. "It was quite intimidating but exciting as well.

"It was scary! Actually that whole team was scary. The first thing I did was try to mark somebody at a corner and I copped an elbow in the jaw. It was some introduction.

"As a centre forward, Kossie was one of the icons of Australian football. I remember when he got to go to Arsenal it was a massive move for the time. He was always a real competitor on the field and certainly the same as a coach... he didn't change much."

Kosmina ended his club career with 133 goals to his name. Inevitably the passion he had for football saw him transition into coaching. Postecoglou later coached against Kosmina in the NSL. The Brisbane Roar boss took over South Melbourne in the 1990s while Kossie took the reins first at Newcastle, then in Brisbane with the Strikers.

"His teams reflected his sort of personality. They were very competitive outfits. The players who played for him were well organised and worked hard."

The Roar coach added that Kosmina's spiky character reflected his sheer passion for the game. "It's part of sport that there are all types of characters – it would be pretty boring if everyone was all the same.

"And the thing people respect about Kossie is that if he's got something to say, he'll say it. At least you know where you stood with him."

Kosmina mentored the Hunter club in 1997/98 before three seasons in Queensland with the Strikers. There he helped bring through the likes of current Qantas Socceroos Matt McKay and Jon McKain, prompting the side's nickname "Kossie's Kids".

"He had a sense of throwing young players in. He was fearless in that sense in his selections. It's been kind of a trademark for him that he carried on into the Hyundai A-League," added Postecoglou, who has clearly been influenced in this regard at Brisbane Roar.

Kosmina then moved back to South Australia to take over new club Adelaide United in the final season of the NSL in 2004, continuing as the side transitioned into the new Hyundai A-League by the following year.

It was with the Reds that he won a Hyundai A-League Premiers Plate in that first season, which was followed by a second place finish in the league in 2006/7.

In 2007, Kosmina returned to Sydney and coached the Sky Blues for just over a year. This stint included a high-profile game against David Beckham's LA Galaxy ending in a thrilling 5-3 win in front of over 80,000 fans.

These days Kosmina lives in South Australia, where he occasionally works in the media and speaks at various functions where he is rightly heralded as one of the great Qantas Socceroos of all time. ●

First-ever NSL goal

Kossie has written himself into the history books

John Kosmina has been front and centre at some of the most historic moments in our game.

In 1977 at Canberra's Manuka Oval he scored the first ever goal in the inaugural National Soccer League.

As a 19-year-old Kosmina nabbed the history-making goal in the seventh minute against Canberra City at the time coached by the legendary Qantas Socceroo Johnny Warren.

Making it even more meritorious was the fact it was Kosmina's third match in a week, as he'd been part of two Qantas Socceroos international in the days leading up to the fixture.

Fast forward to 2005 and the 19th minute of Adelaide United's first match in the Hyundai A-League against Newcastle Jets. Now a coach, Kossie watched on from the Reds' dugout as Carl Veart scored the new league's first-ever goal, no doubt happy to have contributed to Aussie football history again.

SEASON 7 AT THE DOUBLE

The Hyundai A-League is back next month with a blockbuster opening round and the arrival of two Qantas Socceroo superstars

HYUNDAI A-LEAGUE COUNTDOWN

In just 36 days, it's back. The Hyundai A-League – the competition that at this very stadium on March 13 witnessed a never-to-be-forgotten Grand Final of high drama and spine-tingling tension – kicks off its seventh highly anticipated campaign.

Last season's nail-biting Hyundai A-League Grand Final – won by Brisbane Roar over Central Coast Mariners in a penalty shoot-out – reflected a campaign widely regarded as the best yet.

And with the prospect of seeing Qantas Socceroos Harry Kewell at Melbourne Victory and Brett Emerton with Sydney FC weave their magic, this Hyundai A-League will surely be the biggest, most exciting yet...

THE TEAMS

BRISBANE ROAR

With the core of the double-winning squad back in the saddle, and super-coach Ange Postecoglou signed up on a long-term deal, it's hard not to believe the Brisbane juggernaut won't be back bigger than ever.

Thomas Broich will again provide the flair, while young Rocky Visconte looks set to build on last season's promising performances alongside a few new foreign stars.

And with a growing fan-base, who'd bet against Roar ripping it up again?

ADELAIDE UNITED

A host of new signings give Reds fans a new hope this season with Qantas Socceroos Jon McKain, Bruce Djite and Dario Vidosic joining Ukrainian Evgeniy Levchenko in midfield.

And with Dutch coach Rini Coolen learning from his first year in the Hyundai A-League last season, he will know exactly what it will take for United to take the next step after falling short in last season's finals.

CENTRAL COAST MARINERS

Graham Arnold's men came within a whisker of winning the Hyundai A-League title and with the bulk of the squad still at his disposal –and with strong additions including midfielder Adriano Pellegrino from Perth Glory – many are tipping this to be the year of the Mariner.

Can they bounce back from the heartbreak of March 13 though? It will certainly be a powerful motivator for the Gosford-based club who have the quality to go all the way.

GOLD COAST UNITED

This is another club which has radically overhauled its roster – including losing leader Jason Culina – which makes it even harder to forecast how United will fare.

However, coach Miron Bleiberg is a wily customer and has already taken his club to two Hyundai A-League finals series in a row.

Watch out for new visa signings Paul Beekmans and Peter Jungschlager, who've caught the eye in pre-season, while former Qantas Socceroo Joel Porter in attack still has what it takes.

NEWCASTLE JETS

Led by new signing Jason Culina, as well as stalwarts Kasey Wehrman and Ryan Griffiths, Newcastle Jets have the quality for a finals push after failing to qualify for last season's finals series.

Look out for Marco Jesic, who has returned to some great form in the pre-season after his injury woes. Branko Culina knows what it takes to make the finals and the canny coach will be desperate to get the side back there for new owner Nathan Tinkler.

PERTH GLORY

Goalscoring machine Shane Smeltz was the headline signing of the off-season, joining Travis Dodd and former Celtic midfielder Liam Miller. Defenders Dean Heffernan, Bas Van Den Brink and keeper Danny Vukovic round out an impressive cast of new faces brought in by coach Ian Ferguson. ▸

Expectations are high - as always in football-mad Perth - with owner Tony Sage keen to finally see a return on his massive investment.

MELBOURNE VICTORY

Former Brisbane Roar goal-poacher Jean Carlos Solorzano and Kiwi sensation Marco Rojas were two key signings joining former Roar starlet Isaka Cernak who inked a deal late last season.

However, the signing of Qantas Socceroo superstar Kewell was a massive boost as the buzz in Melbourne for Hyundai A-League football reaches fever pitch.

This is a hugely exciting new era for the two-time Hyundai A-League champions who have new coach Mehmet Durakovic at the helm.

MELBOURNE HEART

Another club to have strengthened in the final third with Dutch coach John van't Schip adding Brazilian forward Maycon, Qantas Socceroo David Williams, Victory star Mate Dugandzic and playmaker and Hyundai A-League fan favourite Fred to an enticing Heart mix.

The club will have learnt plenty of hard lessons from their first season in the competition and with a more mobile squad will be tough to beat this time around.

SYDNEY FC

It's been a roller-coaster two seasons for Vitezslav Lavicka's Sky Blues. They hoisted the Hyundai A-League grand final trophy for season five but last season failed to even make the finals. Who knows what will happen this time around but with the arrival of Qantas Socceroo superstar Emerton and a refashioned central defence - one of their key weaknesses last season - Sydney look very strong. And with Nick Carle, the returning Karol Kisel and striker Bruno Cazarine, FC have the quality to mount a serious challenge

WELLINGTON PHOENIX

The hardest trip in the Hyundai A-League is the flight across the Tasman to Wellington. Ricki Herbert's men have proved virtually unbeatable at home in recent seasons and with the addition of full-back Jimmy Downey and former Red Lucas Pantelis in midfield, they've added pace and experience to the mix. If they can fix that poor form on the road, this is a side that can do very well this season.

STARS ON SHOW

BRETT EMERTON (Sydney FC)

To have a player like Emerton direct from a regular starting role in the English Premier League with Blackburn Rovers is a massive coup for the Hyundai A-League. Emerton arrives still at the peak of his career and will be a fabulous addition to the competition.

THOMAS BROICH (Brisbane Roar)

Broich loves Brisbane Roar and for the city's fans, the feeling is mutual. The former German U-21 international arrived with little fanfare last season but lit up the Hyundai A-League with his creativity and penchant for spectacular goals.

FRED (Melbourne Heart)

The Brazilian talisman is back in Melbourne, this time for Heart after making his name with their cross-town rivals Victory in their all-conquering second season. With an arsenal of attacking talent around him, the 31-year-old playmaker looks set to wreak havoc again.

HARRY KEWELL (Melbourne Victory)

It was the signing that the Hyundai A-League in fact the entire nation - was talking about when the Qantas Socceroo hero inked a deal with Victory last month. Some have suggested it's the biggest signing in the history of the Aussie sport - what is for sure, this will be a Kewell new season with Harry about.

FIRST ROUND MATCH-UPS

BRISBANE ROAR VS CENTRAL COAST MARINERS

When: Saturday October 8, 7.4[illegible]

Suncorp Stadium

What a way to [illegible] - the Hyundai A-League Grand Final rematch. Two great sides with [illegible] good football [illegible] managers in the league [illegible] Bozanic vs Paartalu; Ange vs Arn[illegible]

GOLD COAST UNITED VS WELLINGTON PHOENIX

When: Sunday October 9, 4pm Skilled [illegible], Gold Co[illegible]

United has remodeled their squad [illegible] one better than last season after falling [illegible] Final. Wellington will be keen to start the new season with a good result [illegible] something they've struggled to d[illegible] at [illegible]

NEWCASTLE JETS VS MELBOURNE HEART

When: Saturday October [illegible]

[illegible]

MELBOURNE [illegible] VS SYDNEY FC

When: Saturday October 8, [illegible]

Etihad Stadium, Melbo[illegible]

PERTH GLORY VS ADELAIDE UNITED

When: Sunday October 9, 4.30[illegible]

[illegible] Stadium, Perth

**Please note: All match times are [illegible] venue time zones and fixtur[illegible] to change without[illegible]*

SHOOT SCORE

Test your friends or quietly exercise your grey matter. No prizes, just a bit of fun!

1 In which year did Qantas Socceroo Matt McKay make his senior national team debut?

2 What was the score when Australia hosted Iraq in a 2010 FIFA World Cup qualifier in June 2008 in Brisbane?

3 What was the score the last time Australia and Thailand met in a senior international?

4 In which season did Qantas Socceroo Alex Brosque play for Brisbane Roar in the Hyundai A-League?

5 How many caps did Aussie Craig Moore rack up in the national team?

6 What was the score when Paraguay played the Qantas Socceroos in Brisbane in October 2006?

7 Which players retired from the national team that night?

8 Who scored the Qantas Socceroos' first goal against New Zealand in June this year?

9 Which club does Qantas Socceroo Luke Wilkshire play for?

10 True or false: former Socceroo Eddie Krncevic has been inducted into the FFA Hall of Fame?

11 Which Australian won the best young player at the 2011 FIFA Women's World Cup?

12 Which two Hyundai A-League clubs will represent Australia in the 2012 AFC Champions League?

13 How old is Qantas Socceroo Carl Valeri?

14 Which club does Qantas Socceroo Josh Kennedy play for?

15 True or false: Australia defeated Uzbekistan 6-1 at the AFC Asian Cup 2011?

16 Who scored Australia's goals in last month's 2-1 victory over Wales?

ANSWERS: 1 2006 2 3-0 to Australia 3 4-0 to Australia 4 2005/6 5 82 6 H 7 Tony Popovic, Zeljko Kalac, Tony Vidmar and Scott Chipperfield 8 Brisbane Roar and Central Coast Mariners 9 27 10 True 11 Caitlin Foord 12 Brisbane Roar and Central Coast Mariners 13 Three, it was 6-0 14 Tim Cahill and Robbie Kruse 15 True 16 Tim Cahill and Robbie Kruse

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WENDELL SAILOR

The former League and Union star reveals to Aidan Ormond his respect for the Qantas Socceroos and passion for a certain Hyundai A-League club

Wendell, what's your best memory of watching the Qantas Socceroos?
I guess watching John Aloisi score that penalty in 2005. That was pretty special.

How did you react when he scored?
It just made me proud to be Australian, you know? The whole of Australia was watching. That journey to the World Cup was special.

What got you into football?
As a player whenever I'd go on tour to Europe I'd see matches in La Liga or the EPL. I'm a massive Chelsea fan.

Have you met any of Qantas Socceroos?
Yeah, I've met a few of the boys over the years. I get along quite well with Timmy Cahill and I've met Lucas Neill and did something on TV with Archie Thompson. Geez, they're classy blokes. And I've met Bozza [Mark Bosnich] and Dwight Yorke. They were great to chat with.

The FIFA 2014 World Cup is in Brazil...
I couldn't think of a more deserving country to host a World Cup. They've produced some of the greats from Ronaldo to Pele and loads others. And I guess with the Carnivale that'd one place I'd love to go to.

Favourite player?
Didier Drogba. I just like the way he carries himself. He demands the ball and he's just one of those people you want to meet. My favourite other player is Tim Cahill.

What about the Hyundai A-League?
Yeah, I've been to see a few games. I'm a Brisbane Roar fan because of my history with the city. To sell-out Suncorp stadium like they did in the grand final against Central Coast... everyone knows football's been a sleeping giant for a very long time but I think the players are starting to get the credit they deserve now because, mate, they're working pretty hard.

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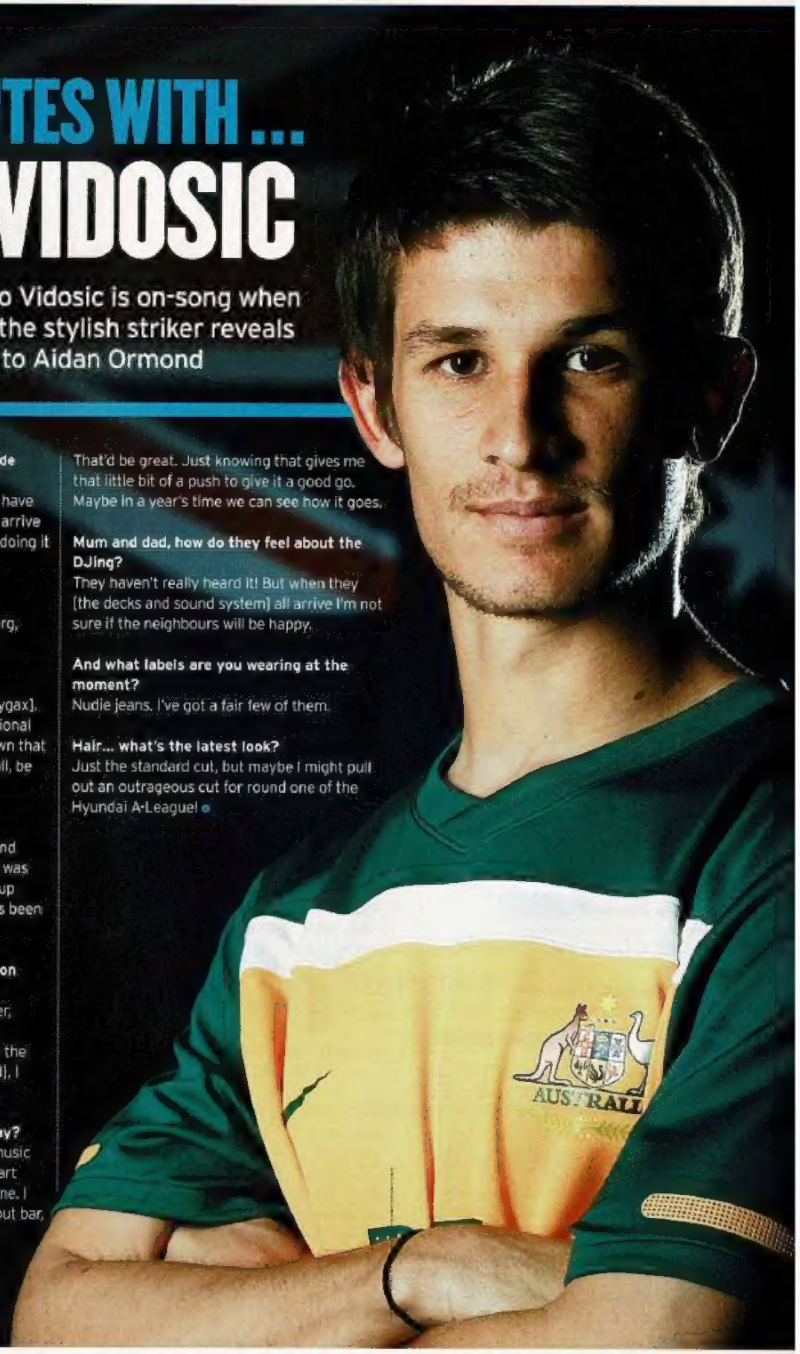
FIVE MINUTES WITH...
DARIO VIDOSIC

Qantas Socceroo Dario Vidosic is on-song when he's on the park, now the stylish striker reveals his musical ambitions to Aidan Ormond



So, Dario, what keeps you busy outside of football?
I like other sports but I also like to DJ. I have my own decks – I'm waiting for them to arrive from Germany. It's relaxing and I enjoy doing it as a way to get away from football.

How did you get into DJ culture?
A team-mate at [former club] Nuremberg, basically he was also a professional DJ.

And who was that?
Daniel Gygax [also known as DJ Dani Gygax]. He'd made an album but was also a national team player with Switzerland. He's shown that you can be successful outside of football, be that DJing or other hobbies.

Tell us more...
He's played at Love Parade in Switzerland [an electronic dance music festival]. He was very good and watching him I picked it up and enjoyed it. He's a professional who's been doing it a long time which helped.

How hard is it to actually mix tracks on the decks?
It's quite difficult. I'd say I was a beginner, as I haven't gotten into it as much as I'd once hoped, but now I'm in Australia [in the Hyundai A-League with Adelaide United], I might have a little more time.

What sort of tracks does DJ Dario play?
Mainly house, but I enjoy lots of other music too. I've set the goals to maybe get a start somewhere and after that I should be fine. I could play a school or maybe a chilled-out bar, something small. That's the goal...

I'm sure football website au.fourfourtwo.com would promote any gig of yours...
That'd be great. Just knowing that gives me that little bit of a push to give it a good go. Maybe in a year's time we can see how it goes.

Mum and dad, how do they feel about the DJing?
They haven't really heard it! But when they [the decks and sound system] all arrive I'm not sure if the neighbours will be happy.

And what labels are you wearing at the moment?
Nudie jeans. I've got a fair few of them.

Hair... what's the latest look?
Just the standard cut, but maybe I might pull out an outrageous cut for round one of the Hyundai A-League!

PAUL WILKINS

In 2011 Paul celebrates his ten-year anniversary as a live-action Qantas Socceroo supporter as he tells Aidan Ormond

PAUL AT A GLANCE

Name: Paul Wilkins
Hyundai A-League club: Melbourne Victory
Age: 28
Occupation: Marketing and Communications Coordinator

Someone told me you decided to fly to Qatar for the AFC Asian Cup 2011 final at half-time of the semi-final. That can't be true, can it?

Yeah, when Robbie Kruse scored (in the semi-final) we thought we should do it. Me and my mates, we booked a flight from Australia and left two nights later. It was a 14-hr flight with about 19 hours on the ground then 13 hours back. I left Friday and was back at work first thing on Monday - and I wasn't away long enough to get jet lag. It was a whirlwind trip and something to tell the grand kids.

What got you into football?

When Harry Kewell started to play for Leeds, then Viduka, I really started to follow the club closely and have continued ever since. I couldn't get a ticket to see the Olyroos play Italy at the 2000 Olympics, so I was looking forward to see Australia play for the first time.

And that opportunity came a year later...

It was the Australia versus France game at the MCG in 2001. Craig Moore scoring with a header - the celebrations with my mates were something special and I've been hooked ever since.

When the national anthem is played, what emotions go through you?

It's an intense sense of pride in your country knowing those 11 players are representative of 22 million people. Singing the national anthem and raising your scarf above your head, it can bring you to tears.

What has been your best highlight?

My first trip overseas when I saw Australia beat England at Upton Park. I was behind the goal when Harry scored - I still remember him robbing Rio Ferdinand in possession to score. It was a night that I'll never forget. I'd saved up my life-savings to go to the UK for a month and I also got to see Leeds play. Other highlights would have to be the two World Cups Australia played in. And given the bushfires tragedy in Victoria, I'll never forget how respectful the Japan fans were before that World Cup qualifier (in February 2009 in Yokohama) For us it was quite touching.

And what would be your ultimate trip?

I guess to say you've been to Pyongyang to watch Australia in a World Cup qualifier - that'd be pretty special. Other than that, Tehran would be amazing. I've always seen football as a way to see the world and learn about local cultures and traditions.

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PRINTERS Webstar, Sydney

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The Socceroo is produced by The Football Republic - a division of Haymarket Media Pty Ltd. (ABN 61 083 063 916). 52 Victoria Street, McMahons Point, NSW 2060.

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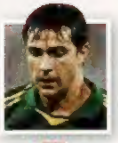
My Perfect Roos

Legend John Aloisi opts for a 4-3-3 with his perfect Qantas Socceroos XI - but is there any room for the man whose penalty got Australia to FIFA World Cup 2006?

GK
Mark Schwarzer
He's been the best performing Socceroo in the last six years and deserves his spot in my best XI.

RB
Brett Emerton
"Emo" has been a consistent performer at club and country level. Great engines.



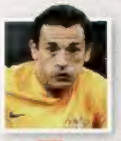
CD
Paul Okon
Played mostly in midfield but early in his career at Club Brugges was brilliant in defence.

CB
Lucas Neill
He was our best player at World Cup 2006 and he's been top class ever since.

LB
Tony Vidmar
Like Emo, he's versatile with fantastic engines - left and right footed too. A top player.

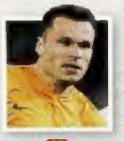
AM
Tim Cahill
Timmy's probably the best goal-scoring midfielder we've ever had, able to strike at key times.

DM
Vince Grella
Vinnie's a great defensive midfielder who breaks up the game and passes superbly.



AM
Joe Skoko
Very creative. I loved playing with "Skokes" - you knew he'd always create chances for you.

RF
Mark Bresciano
He's got that ability to score goals and could play anywhere - right, left or in Cahill's role.



CF
Mark Viduka
"Dukes" was the best striker we've ever produced. On the ball brilliant and can hold up the ball.

LF
Harry Kewell
Harry is one of the most talented players we've ever produced and perfect next to Dukes.

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